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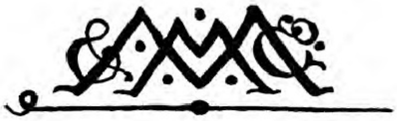
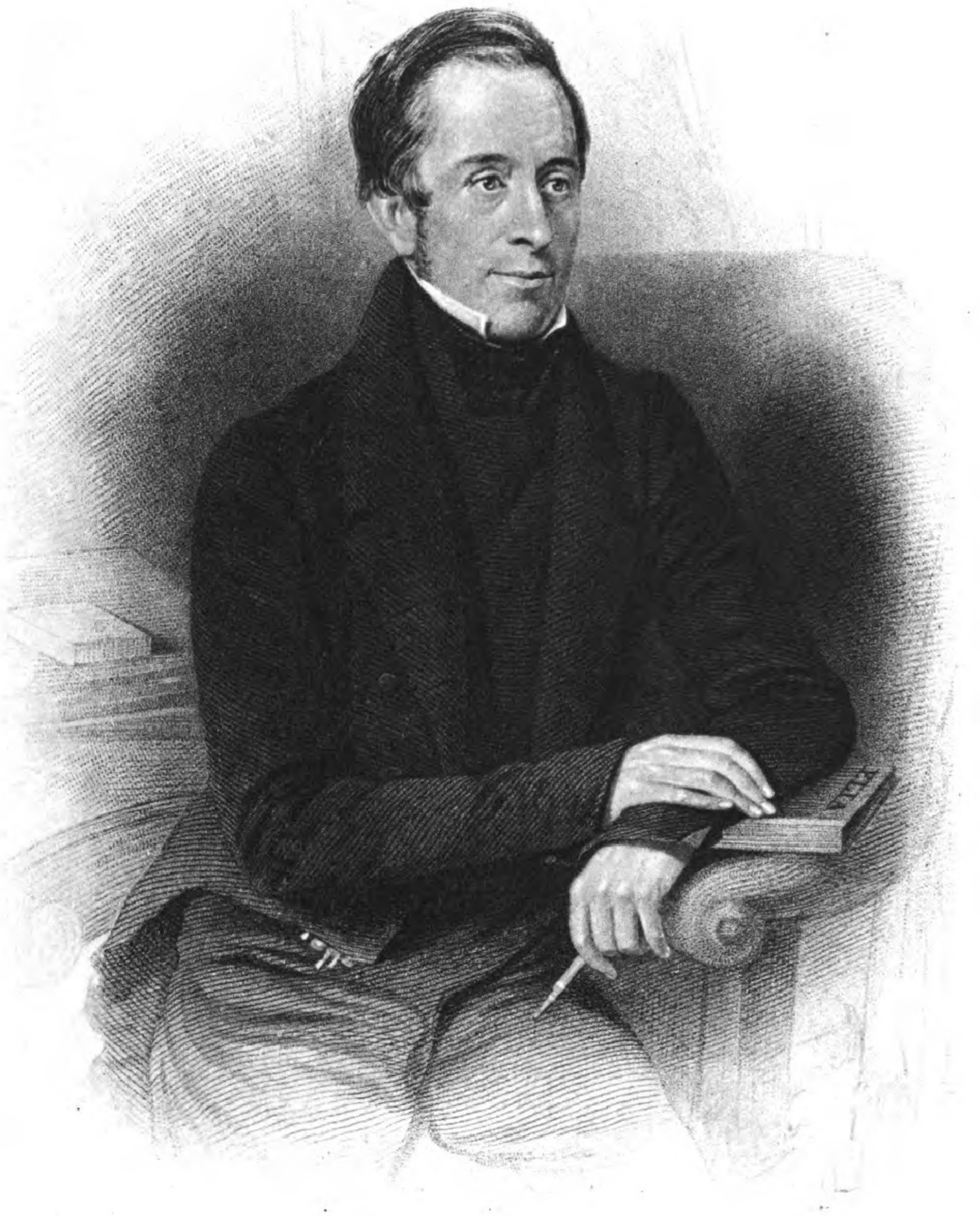
SERIOUS POEMS





Yours very truly

Thos Hood

From the portrait by Lewis.

Walker & Boutall Ph. Sc.

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PRINCETON UNIVERSITY

POEMS

OF

THOMAS HOOD

EDITED BY ALFRED AINGER

VOL. I

SERIOUS POEMS

Rose Cottage,
Winchmore Hill.

London
MACMILLAN AND CO., LIMITED
NEW YORK : THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1897

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PREFATORY NOTE

THE chief sources to which I have been indebted in writing my short Memoir of Hood are the Biography, in two volumes, by his son and daughter; his own "Literary Reminiscences" in the first series of *Hood's Own;* a little volume, of great interest, by Mr. Alexander Elliot, entitled *Hood in Scotland;* the Memoir of the first Charles Wentworth Dilke, by his grandson, prefixed to the collection of his essays, *Papers of a Critic;* Mr. Spielmann's valuable History of *Punch;* and the various obituary and critical notices of Hood published after his death.

I have to thank Sir Charles Wentworth Dilke, Bart., M.P., for his great courtesy in placing at my disposal manuscript letters of Hood's and other documents illustrating his life, originally belonging to his grandfather, above mentioned, Hood's lifelong friend and counsellor.

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MEMOIR

I

(1799—1821)

It is a noticeable fact, testifying, perhaps, how far with Thomas Hood the reputation of the humorist has eclipsed that of the poet, that the abbreviated form of his Christian name by which he is so frequently called seems to be of posthumous origin. There is no evidence that he was known in his lifetime even to his intimate friends as "Tom" Hood, and his wife, after a common practice of that day, always wrote of him in her letters as "Hood." Acting therefore on the principle enunciated by the late Mr. Albert Smith that "you have no right to take liberties with a gentleman's name because he makes you laugh," I enter my humble protest at starting against a too common custom; and most surely there was little in the temperament of the man, or the character of his genius, to justify the familiarity, or to excuse it.

Hood was of Scottish descent, his grandfather having been a humble tiller of the soil near Errol, a village on the north bank of the Tay, between Perth and Dundee. A son of this Hood, after serving his apprenticeship to a bookseller in Dundee, proceeded to London, and making his way by industry and a certain feeling for literature, finally established a publishing business in the Poultry, in partnership with a Mr. Vernor. He seems to have prospered fairly in most ways save in his own bodily health, and that of his family. He had many children, several of whom died in infancy, or lived to exhibit some promise, and then succumbed to the sad inheritance of consumption. The eldest son, James, died in this way, and the father, while tending his son, took the fatal chill which rapidly resulted in his own death. They both died in the autumn of 1811, and Thomas was left the only surviving son. He was rather over twelve years of age, having been born in his father's house in the Poultry on the 23rd of May 1799.

When Hood, in 1839, re-issued the contents of several years' "Comic Annuals" in the new form which he entitled *Hood's Own*, he added, at his publisher's request, certain autobiographical recollections, which are our chief authority for these earlier years. He there tells us that his first school was in Tokenhouse Yard, a convenient distance for a native of the Poultry, and was kept by two maiden ladies of the name of Hogsflesh. "The circumstance," he adds, "would be scarcely worth mentioning, but that, being a day-boarder, and taking my dinner with the family, I became aware of a Baconian brother, who was never mentioned except by his initial, and was probably the prototype of the sensitive 'Mr. H.' in Lamb's unfortunate farce." From this elementary training Hood was transferred in due course to a well-known school at Clapham—the "Prospect House Academy" he was afterwards to celebrate in memorable verse:—

Ay, that's the very house. I know
Its ugly windows, ten a-row!
    Its chimneys in the rear!
And there's the iron rod so high
That drew the thunder from the sky
    And turned our table-beer!

Hood, looking back in later years on these school experiences, did not acknowledge much to be grateful for. Prospect House, he said, was "one of those places

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improperly called *semi*-naries, because they do not half teach anything"; and confessed that all he learned of value was gained in his holiday seasons, or his play hours, when he could gratify an insatiable appetite for general reading, and that he was "an idler, lounger, tattler, rambler, spectator, anything rather than a student."

On the death of his father, in 1811, his mother removed to Islington, and Thomas Hood once more changed his school, this time to "a house, formerly a suburban seat of the unfortunate Earl of Essex, over a grocer's shop, up two pair of stairs, kept by a decayed Dominie, as he would have been called in his native land." The master was a pedant and an eccentric, but loved his craft, and speedily recognised in young Hood a boy who was keen to learn. Hood admits that he at last made some progress even in school subjects. "I picked up *some* Latin, was a tolerable English grammarian, and so good a French scholar that I earned a few guineas—my first literary fee—by revising a new edition of *Paul et Virginie* for the Press."

The exact chronology of Hood's earlier history is hard to fix. He cared as little about dates as his friend Elia, and gives us little or no help in his Literary Reminiscences. His son and daughter, when writing their father's life, seem to have been much in the dark as to his youthful days, and not even to have taken advantage of such light as was available. It was in 1811 that Mrs. Hood and her family removed to Islington, and it was about three years later that her son Thomas was sent away, for reasons of health, to his father's relations in Dundee. How these intervening years are to be appropriated remains uncertain. For a time he was under the care of the "Dominie" just named, and subsequently, according to his own autobiographical fragment (which his son and daughter, oddly enough, treat as of doubtful authority), was placed in a merchant's counting-house in the City. Hood's account of matters is, however, circum-

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stantial, and hardly to be ignored. "A friend of the family," he writes, "having taken a fancy to me, proposed to initiate me in those profitable mercantile mysteries which enabled Sir Thomas Gresham to gild his grasshopper." But it was apparently not long before his health, never robust, began to suffer from confinement to the desk and the lofty stool. "My spirits daily became a shade lower, my flesh was held less and less firmly—in short, in the language of the price-current, it was expected that I must 'submit to a decline.' The doctors who were called in declared imperatively that a mercantile life would be the death of me." And on their recommendation the boy was despatched in a Scotch smack to the fresh sea breezes and a life of entire holiday among his kinsfolk in Dundee.

Hood remained in the north for two or three years, to the great advantage of his bodily health. He boated and fished, and lived generally an out-door life, and was also able to gratify to the full his love of miscellaneous reading. He devoured fiction and the drama and poetry, and whatever else the local libraries afforded him, and made some first experiments in prose and verse in the columns of local newspapers and magazines. He seems to have returned to London, with his health re-established, in 1818, and from that time until 1821 he industriously set himself to acquire that art of draughtsmanship which was ultimately to serve him in good stead in the lighter walks of literature. Hood's mother was sister to a Mr. Sands, an engraver of repute, and Hood was placed under his uncle's instruction. We must suppose that he showed from earliest years a certain turn for caricature. He certainly never in after-life prided himself upon any higher artistic gifts. On the contrary, he asserts that, like the tape-tied curtains mentioned by Mr. Pope, he was "never meant to draw." In a sense this was true. Whatever else he acquired through practice as an engraver, he never succeeded in mastering the difficulties of the human figure. For four years, first with his uncle,

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and later with the Brothers Le Keux, he worked steadily at his art. In a letter to a Dundee friend, dated 1821, he speaks of some recent success with a plate as "the result of four years' learning and experience in the art." He adds, "I was but two years old in engraving when I set up for myself, and have been two more on my own fingers; and as some of my friends seemed doubtful as to the success of such an experiment, I am very happy and somewhat proud of this result, in which I have obtained one object of my ambition."

Such success, however, as he had attained was not sufficient to encourage him to persevere. The truth seems to be that the passion for literature was rapidly supplanting all others. He continued to practise verse-writing, and to devote his leisure to literary pursuits, while following conscientiously the craft he had adopted as his livelihood; but the "bowl," as he expressed it, "had at last found its natural bias." "While thus playing at literature, an event was ripening which was to introduce me to authorship in earnest, and make the muse, with whom I had only flirted, my companion for life. In the beginning of the year 1821 a memorable duel, originating in a pen-and-ink quarrel, took place at Chalk Farm, and terminated in the death of Mr. John Scott, the able editor of the *London Magazine*. The melancholy result excited great interest, in which I fully participated, little dreaming that his catastrophe involved any consequences of importance to myself. But on the loss of its conductor the periodical passed into other hands. The new proprietors were my friends; they sent for me, and after some preliminaries I was duly installed as a sort of sub-editor of the *London Magazine*."

It was in the summer of 1821 that the Magazine entered on its new lease of life, with Messrs. Taylor and Hessey as publishers and editors, and Thomas Hood in the post of sub-editor. He was only twenty-two, and the enthusiasm with which he entered on the hazardous path of literature was already tempered by anxiety, from

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which to the end of his life he was never free, as to his health, and by a grave family bereavement which occurred at the very outset. Writing to a friend in October 1821, Hood says—"I have sustained a very severe and irreparable loss in the death of my dear mother about three months since, by which event a serious charge has devolved upon me; and I have all the concern of a household and a family of four sisters—a charge which can never be a light one." The charge was indeed heavy, and the general outlook never of the brightest. But he applied himself at once to his new duties with the cheerful courage that never forsook him even in his gravest necessities. These duties were at first mainly routine and mechanical, but the personal association with poets and men of letters, who had been hitherto but names to him, brought him the keenest happiness. "Even the more irksome parts of authorship," he tells us, "such as the correction of the press, were to me labours of love. I received a revise from Mr. Baldwin's Mr. Parker, as if it had been a proof of his regard; forgave him all his slips, and really thought that printers' devils were not so black as they are painted. But my top-gallant glory was in 'our contributors.'" And these contributors included Lamb and Hazlitt, Cary and Procter, John Hamilton Reynolds and Allan Cunningham.

Moreover, from the first Hood was encouraged to practise whatever literary faculty was in him. Not only was a free hand given him as to the humorous "Notices to Correspondents," with which each number of the magazine was prefaced, but happily his publishers (who were their own editors), recognising in their subordinate talents more worthy of cultivation, allowed him from the beginning to contribute verse to the magazine, though without his signature. The very first number with which he was connected contains a poem by Hood, never acknowledged by him in life, or recognised by his editors until many years after his death, when the surviving publisher, Mr. Hessey, disclosed the authorship to

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Hood's son and daughter. This little ode, "To Hope," appeared in the July number of the *London* for 1821, and has a peculiarly pathetic interest. From the merely literary standpoint it shows a great advance upon anything he had already printed. He shows himself to have already formed something like a style, though differing materially from his second manner, when the romantic spell of Keats had begun to work in him. But a deeper interest lies in the young poet's thus giving "sad presage of his future years," and at the age of twenty-two, with all the world before him, only hoping "against hope." And this same melancholy was to colour all his serious, and much of his humorous, verse for the remainder of his life :—

> But thou canst sing of love no more,
> For Celia showed that dream was vain—
> And many a fancied bliss is o'er,
> That comes not e'en in dreams again.
> Alas ! alas !
> How pleasures pass,
> And leave thee now no subject, save
> The peace and bliss beyond the grave.

It was in the *London Magazine* for July 1821 that Hood's first contribution appeared. The same number contained a review of a new volume of poems by one who was later to be allied with Hood by marriage, and also largely to determine Hood's poetic manner during the years that followed—*The Garden of Florence*, by John Hamilton Reynolds, then writing under the name of "John Hamilton." Reynolds had been the intimate friend and disciple of Keats. John Keats had already passed away, his suffering life having closed at Rome in February of this year. It does not appear that Hood ever met him in the flesh, but the influence of Keats was as surely to be traced in Hood's subsequent verse as in the little volume by Alfred Tennyson published ten years later. Another writer destined to influence Hood's future as markedly, though in quite other ways, had been a regular contributor to the magazine for a year

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past, and was already undoubtedly its chief glory. The essays of Elia were in full career, and the number that published Hood's first poem contained also the exquisite prose idyll, "Mackery End in Hertfordshire." The first introduction to Lamb was an epoch in Hood's life; and the manner of it, as recounted by Hood himself, so characteristic of both men, and so interesting as a contribution to our impressions of Lamb's personality, that no apology is required for quoting it here:—

"I was sitting one morning beside our editor, busily correcting proofs, when a visitor was announced, whose name, grumbled by a low ventriloquial voice like Tom Pipes calling from the hold through the hatchway, did not resound distinctly on my tympanum. However, the door opened, and in came a stranger, a figure remarkable at a glance, with a fine head on a small spare body supported by two almost immaterial legs. He was clothed in sables of a byegone fashion, but there was something wanting—or something present—about him that certified that he was neither a divine, nor a physician, nor a schoolmaster; from a certain neatness and sobriety in his dress, coupled with his sedate bearing, he might have been taken, but that such a costume would be anomalous, for a *Quaker* in black. He looked still more like (what he really was) a literary modern antique, a new-old author, a living anachronism, contemporary at once with Burton the elder and Colman the younger. Meanwhile he advanced with rather a peculiar gait, his walk was plantigrade, and with a cheerful 'How d'ye?' and one of the blandest, sweetest smiles that ever brightened a manly countenance, held out two fingers to the editor. . . . After the literary business had been settled the editor invited his contributor to dinner, adding, 'We shall have a hare.'—'And—and—and—and many friends.' The hesitation in the speech, and the readiness of the allusion, were alike characteristic of the individual, whom his familiars will perchance have recognised already as the delightful essayist, the capital

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critic, the pleasant wit and humorist, the delicate-minded and large-hearted Charles Lamb! He was shy, like myself, with strangers, so that despite my yearnings our first meeting scarcely amounted to an introduction. We were both at dinner, amongst the host's many friends, but our acquaintance got no further, in spite of a desperate attempt on my part to attract his notice. His complaint of the Decay of Beggars presented another chance; I wrote, on coarse paper and in ragged English, a letter of thanks to him as if from one of his mendicant clients, but it produced no effect. I had given up all hope, when one night, sitting sick and sad in my bedroom, racked with the rheumatism, the door was suddenly opened, the well-known quaint figure in black walked in without any formality, and with a cheerful 'Well, boy, how are you?' and the bland, sweet smile, extended the two fingers. They were eagerly clutched, of course, and from that hour we were friends."

From that hour Charles Lamb was to be Thomas Hood's dearest friend, and the god of his literary idolatry. Ten years later, Hood, when on the eve of an involuntary migration to the Rhine—there (if it might be) to mend his broken fortunes—was among those who on that sad December day stood round Lamb's grave in Edmonton churchyard. "It may be a dangerous confession to make," he wrote five years afterwards, "but I shed no tear, and scarcely did a sigh escape from my bosom. There were many sources of comfort. He had not died young. He had happily gone before that noble sister, who, not in selfishness, but the devotion of a unique affection, would have prayed to survive him but for a day, lest he should miss that tender care which had watched over him upwards from a little child." The words were written in the Literary Reminiscences contributed to *Hood's Own* in 1839; and in Lewis's portrait of the author, prefixed to the same work, the volume on which Hood's arm is depicted as resting, has for its superscription "Elia."

II

(1821—1825)

It was especially at the monthly dinners at which Taylor and Hessey gathered their chief contributors about them, that Hood was now to form congenial friendships and find a stimulus and encouragement to authorship which rapidly bore fruit. In his "Literary Reminiscences" he recalls with enthusiasm how he revelled in opportunities of converse with men so various and interesting as Lamb and Clare, Allan Cunningham and Cary, John Hamilton Reynolds and De Quincey. And when Charles and Mary Lamb removed to Colebrooke Row, Islington, in 1823, and thus became his near neighbours, Hood had the great delight of meeting occasionally Wordsworth and Coleridge. These were probably the happiest days of Hood's life, or at least the days freest from anxiety. With a fixed salary, and leisure to write, the money-pinch was as yet unfelt.

For these four years of Hood's life, preceding his marriage in 1825, there is little or no biographical material. He was still living at Islington with one or more of his sisters, and the earliest friendship we know him to have formed was with John Hamilton Reynolds, a frequent contributor to the *London*, under the name of "Edward Herbert." Reynolds, then a young man of six-and-twenty, lived with his father and sisters in that quarter of the City of London called "Little Britain," a residence handy for Christ's Hospital, where his father held the post of chief writing-master. Hood seems to have been drawn to Reynolds in the first instance by a certain poetical affinity, as well as by certain humorous tendencies in common. Reynolds had already published more than one volume of verse, and had passed from an earlier stage in which he wrote under the spell of Byron, to being the intimate friend and poetic follower of Keats.

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His latest and ripest poetic fruit had appeared in the little volume *The Garden of Florence*, in the very year of Hood's joining the magazine. The results of his friendship with Reynolds, and of the influence of Keats transmitted through Reynolds, were speedily to appear.

Indeed the history of Hood for those next four years is that of a rapid development of poetic style. After the lines "To Hope," in the magazine for July 1821, nothing more appeared from his pen until the November following, when he printed some fluent verses (signed "Incog.") called the "Departure of Summer," showing considerable command of the lavish descriptive faculty of Keats, but with slight originality of thought or treatment. An interval of four months again elapsed, and a fragment entitled "The Sea of Death" (this time signed with three asterisks) exhibited a distinct increase of imagination, and that strange bias towards thoughts of decay and death which was to mark Hood's genius through life. The manner is again that of Keats and Reynolds, though divergences of temperament are clearly perceptible, and there are felicities of expression which he had not before attained, such as in the concluding lines:—

——and with them, Time
Slept, as he sleeps upon the silent face
Of a dark dial in a sunless place.

Some lines in the following number of the magazine, "To an Absentee" (surely addressed to Jane Reynolds), show the more simple and genial side of Hood's invention, and that happy reconciliation, in the last stanza, of poetry and wit that was so essentially his own:—

O'er hill, and dale, and distant sea,
Through all the miles that stretch between,
My thoughts must fly to rest on thee,
And would, though worlds should intervene.

Nay, thou art now so dear, methinks,
The farther we are forced apart,
Affection's firm, elastic links
But bind the closer round the heart.

For now we sever each from each,
I learn what I have lost in thee ;
Alas ! that nothing else could teach
How great indeed my love should be.

Farewell ! I did not know thy worth,
But thou art gone, and now 'tis prized.
So angels walked unknown on earth,
But when they flew were recognised.

Once more, after an interval (in August 1822), there appeared in the magazine a poem of Hood's, marking an extraordinary, and all but inexplicable, advance upon anything he had yet written. He was indeed advancing, in more than one sense, by leaps and bounds, for the buoyant anapaests he employed—certainly not borrowed from Keats or Reynolds, though probably from Leigh Hunt or an early ode of Shelley's—give it a position quite unique among Hood's poems. "Lycus the Centaur" was, as usual, without any signature, and was not even furnished with the brief "argument," so necessary for its elucidation, which its aûthor prefixed to it when reprinted in a volume in 1827. If the poem attracted no attention it was hardly to the discredit of the reading public of that day, for, even with the assistance of a prose "argument" as interpreter, the poem has obscurities that call for careful and repeated perusal. Although Hood did not borrow any one of Keats's characteristic metres, the lush and opulent diction of the poem is thoroughly Keatsian, as well as the almost audacious use of *enjambement* in the metre ; and it is more than probable that a poem or poems of Keats's suggested to Hood this experiment of a Greek mythological legend dealing with magic and magicians. Keats's latest volume had included "Lamia," a kindred story of enchantment which the poet had found in Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, one of those stories, as Mr. Sidney Colvin has said, "where Greek life and legend come nearest to the mediaeval." A young Greek gentleman, of the name of Lycius, having fallen in love with a fair Phoenician, finally marries her, only to discover,

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through an officious friend, after some time of happy married life, that his bride was in reality a "Lamia"—a serpent—upon which discovery the bride and her possessions instantly vanish, to leave the husband fatally smitten. Burton indicates the source of the legend as from "Philostratus in his fourth Book *de vitâ Apollonii*"—Apollonius being the philosophic friend who had wrecked the happiness of the young couple. Hood, when including "Lycus the Centaur" in his volume of 1827, had possibly been advised to supply (as Keats had done at the end of "Lamia") some explanatory notes; and accordingly, in addition to the brief argument just mentioned, he gravely informed his readers that the legend was to be found in "an unrolled manuscript of Apollonius Curius," an authority which, it is needless to add, only existed in his own facetious imagination. The "Apollonius," as we have seen, he owed to Keats; the "Curius" is a characteristic stroke of Hood's peculiar humour. The Centaur's name, it will also be noticed, is but one letter removed from that of Keats's hero.

Hood's argument, even when thus tardily supplied, was too brief, and hardly explicit enough to help the reader much. It ran as follows:—

"Lycus, detained by Circe in her magical dominion, is beloved by a Water-Nymph, who, desiring to render him immortal, has recourse to the Sorceress. Circe gives her an incantation to pronounce, which should turn Lycus into a horse; but the horrible effect of the charm causing her to break off in the midst, he becomes a Centaur."

What the argument fails to make clear is that Circe herself burned with an unrequited passion for Lycus, and therefore prepared the incantation for purposes of revenge. Circe is, in fact, a "Belle Dame sans merci," and it is quite possible that the lyric masterpiece of Keats so named had suggested to Hood the similar enchantment of a group of lovers:—

I saw pale kings and princes too,
Pale warriors, death-pale were they all,
They cried, "La Belle Dame sans merci"
Hath thee in thrall—

only that in the case of the unhappy Lycus the "pale kings and princes" around him were transformed to beasts. Nor does the argument include any reference to the touching *dénouement* of the story. The transformed Lycus sees his dishonoured shape for the first time reflected in the stream of his adoring Nymph :—

Then I asked of the wave,
What monster I was, and it trembled and gave
The true shape of my grief, and I turned with my face
From all waters for ever, and fled through that place,
Till with horror more strong than all magic I passed
Its bounds, and the world was before me at last.

Then the unhappy Centaur "wanders in sorrow," yearning for the society and converse of men, and yet ashamed to face them—hearing afar off the voices of human triumphs and joys, and yet only daring to steal secretly near the city and listen in ambush to the accents of human loves and cares, not venturing to ask or to offer sympathy—one courageous child alone daring to take pity on him :—

For the haunters of fields they all shunned me by flight,
The men in their horror, the women in fright;
None ever remained save a child once that sported
Among the wild blue-bells, and playfully courted
The breeze; and beside him a speckled snake lay
Tight strangled, because it had hissed him away
From the flowers at his finger: he rose and drew near
Like a son of Immortals, one born with no fear,
But with strength of black locks and with eyes azure bright
To grow to large manhood of merciful might
He came, with his face of bold·wonder, to feel
The hair of my side, and to lift up my heel,
And questioned my face with wide eyes; but when under
My lids he saw tears,—for I wept at his wonder,
He stroked me, and uttered such kindliness then,
That the once love of women, the friendship of men
In past sorrow, no kindness e'er came like a kiss

On my heart in its desolate day such as this !
And I yearned at his cheeks in my love, and down bent,
And lifted him up in my arms with intent
To kiss him,—but he, cruel-kindly, alas !
Held out to my lips a plucked handful of grass !
Then I dropt him in horror, but felt as I fled
The stone he indignantly hurled at my head,
That dissevered my ear,—but I felt not, whose fate
Was to meet more distress in his love than his hate.

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Hood was no scholar. His acquaintance with the myth of Circe was certainly due to some English version of the *Odyssey*—perhaps to his friend Lamb's "Adventures of Ulysses," and the incorporation with it of a new Centaur Legend, wholly of his own invention, deprives the poem of any claim to be taken seriously from the classic standpoint. The germ of the whole poem may, indeed, with probability be assigned to the purely grotesque idea of an incantation, nipped in the bud, producing a corresponding hybrid as its result. And yet no one can doubt, after reading such a passage as that just quoted, that notwithstanding this curiously unclassical treatment of a classical theme, and all the strange jumble of ancient and modern in the incidents—the imagination of the humorist treading closely upon that of the poet—there is abundant evidence of a genuine poetic imagination pointing to still greater possibilities. Indeed Hood's more thoughtful associates in the magazine at once recognised this fact, and urged him to cultivate his talent, but it was destined to meet with no general recognition. If the yet finer quality of Keats had to wait for any wide appreciation, this was not strange. The same volume of the *London* contained another poem of Hood's of some length, this time in the stanza of Keats's "Isabella," and clearly modelled upon that poem. "The Two Peacocks of Bedfont" relates a legend, long current in the village of that name in Middlesex, based upon the circumstance that in the churchyard stand some specimens of Topiary work—yew trees shaped, after a familiar fashion, into peacocks. Hood, whose studies in Keats were still attracting him to topics of enchantment, adopts the legend referred to, according to which the peacocks represented the retributive destinies of two proud and selfish spinsters, whose ostentatious wealth and contempt for their humbler neighbours had once been a scandal to the village. The subject is not specially happy, and the treatment at times conventional, but there is again evident the opulent fancy of his model, although it was not for Hood or Reynolds or any contemporary to rival the matchless felicities of Keats. Hood had caught the prodigal romantic manner, but a certain close and tender observation of nature in treating of country life and "sweet garden scenes" is all his own, and is revealed now and again in such lovely lines as—

And in the garden-plot, from day to day,
The lily blooms its long white life away.

Hood seems to have written no more in the *London* after June 1823. Mr. Hessey, the publisher, who was still living in 1859, could find no trace of any contribution after that date, and as Mr. Hessey tells us that his acquaintance with Hood ended with the year 1823, we must suppose that his connection with the magazine as sub-editor came also to an end at that time. At the close of the year 1824 the proprietorship of the magazine once more changed hands. How Hood was employed during the year that followed is not clear. His son assigns (but only conjecturally) some half-dozen lyrics to this year, and it is likely that Hood found employment of some kind in journalism. Indeed throughout his life he occasionally wrote theatrical notices and reviews of books. But in 1825 he found himself in a position to marry, and the step was probably made possible, as we shall see, by the success of his first humorous publication, which was practically to determine his chief occupation for the rest of his life. Hood's intimacy with John Hamilton Reynolds had introduced him to the family in Little Britain, and led to his engagement to Jane Reynolds, one

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of the four sisters living under the parental roof. And on 5th May 1825, according to the Parish Register (not 1824, as stated by the son and daughter), Thomas Hood, of the Parish of St. Mary, Islington, was married to Jane Reynolds, in St. Botolph's Church, Aldgate. The church stands only a few yards from the bride's home in Little Britain, and Jane Reynolds was doubtless married from her father's house. Hood's son delicately intimates that the match was not very acceptable to the Reynolds family, and this is not difficult to believe. Hood's prospects of making a livelihood by literature were far from satisfactory, and his health already was precarious—rheumatic attacks being very frequent. The marriage was one of truest affection, and through the long struggle with sickness and poverty that was to follow there is ample evidence of a stedfast devotion on both sides that never weakened. "My own dearest and best" are the opening words of most of Hood's letters to his wife. "I never was anything, dearest, till I knew you—and I have been a better, happier, more prosperous man ever since." And Hood never belied this tender assurance either by word or deed.

III

(1825—1827)

WHILE Hood had been from time to time writing and publishing serious verse in the columns of the *London*, he had been practising, also anonymously, a very different talent. From the first it had been part of his duty as sub-editor to reply to correspondents in a page or two prefixed to each number of the Magazine, entitled *The Lion's Head*. Where, as in the majority of cases, the contribution thus noticed had to be rejected, the young sub-editor was allowed to dismiss it with some pleasant flippancy, often taking the form of a pun. "Colin has

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sent us a Summer Pastoral, and says that he can supply us with one every month. Has he always got sheep in his *pen?*" "N. of Margate says he means to send us 'a marine subject.' We hope it will be a Mermaid." "G.'s Muse should use Steer's opodeldoc, which is allowed to be excellent for *strains*." Though not specially brilliant, these plays upon words have the quality which was always to distinguish Hood's puns. However far-fetched, they are droll, and show the humorist as well as the wit. And a few months after he had been in office, in November 1821, Hood ventured on a more elaborate experiment in the same direction, modestly concealing his authorship by inserting the verses in *The Lion's Head* as an accepted contribution from "an unknown correspondent." They were in the form of an Ode to Dr. Kitchiner, the well-known gastronomist, and author of the *Cook's Oracle*, then in the height of his reputation. The Ode is slight and unequal compared with Hood's later efforts in the same direction, but the concluding verse bears his unmistakable mark:—

> Ah me, my soul is touched with sorrow
>   To think how flesh must pass away—
>   So mutton that is warm to-day
> Is cold and turned to hashes on the morrow!
>   Farewell! I would say more, but I
>   Have other fish to fry.

The chief interest for us of this *jeu d'esprit* lies in the fact that it was to determine the chief direction of Hood's talents for the rest of his life. Out of this Ode to Dr. Kitchiner (or Kitch*e*ner, as Hood inevitably spelled it) grew the little collection of similar Odes by Hood and his future brother-in-law, J. H. Reynolds. Reynolds was master of a fluent humorous vein, thinner and altogether less remarkable than Hood's, which he had already exhibited some years earlier in the anticipatory parody of Wordsworth's *Peter Bell*, destined to become chiefly famous through its having led to a parody of far greater power, Shelley's *Peter Bell the Third*. The *Odes and*

Addresses to Great People, by Hood and Reynolds, but published without their names, appeared in the spring of 1825. The Odes were fifteen in number, of which Hood wrote eight, and these by far the more remarkable. The little volume attracted immediate attention, and a second edition followed in a few weeks. I have elsewhere told how it fell into the hands of Coleridge, then living under Mr. Gillman's roof at Highgate, but his letter to Charles Lamb, attributing to him the authorship, must be quoted once more—

"My dear Charles, it was certainly written by you, or under you, or *unâ cum* you. I know none of your frequent visitors capacious and assimilative enough of your converse, to have reproduced you so honestly, supposing you had left yourself in pledge in his lock-up house. Gillman to whom I read the spirited Parody on the Introduction to *Peter Bell*, the *Ode to the Great Unknown*, and to Mrs. Fry—*he* speaks doubtfully of Reynolds and Hood. . . .

"*Thursday night, ten o'clock.*—No! Charles, it is you! I have read them over again, and I understand why you have *anoned* the book. The puns are nine in ten good—many excellent—the *Newgatory*, transcendent—then, moreover and besides, (to speak with becoming modesty), excepting my own self who is there but you who could write the musical lines and stanzas that are intermixed?"

And Lamb writes back on the 2nd of July from Colebrooke Row, Islington, to disclaim Coleridge's compliment—

"The Odes are four-fifths done by Hood—a silentish young man you met at Islington one day, an invalid. The rest are Reynolds's, whose sister Hood has lately married. I have not had a broken finger in them. Hood will be gratified as much as I am by your mistake." And Lamb adds, at the conclusion of his letter, "Hood has just come in: his sick eyes sparkled with health when he read your approbation."

One must be allowed to differ from Coleridge, even though it be in a matter of critical insight, and pronounce that he "nodded" for once in so confidently attributing these effusions to Lamb, whose style (save in the love of punning) they in no respect recall. And even the puns are of a sort which is peculiar to Hood. Coleridge, however, assuredly cites one of the most astonishing, when he refers to Hood's criticism on the methods of Mrs. Fry, the admirable Prison philanthropist, for setting up her school *in* prison instead of outside it, seeing that prevention is surely better than cure:—

> I like your carriage, and your silken grey,
> Your dove-like habits, and your silent preaching;
> But I don't like your Newgatory teaching.

Again, the quotations prefixed as appropriate to the several Odes are no less "transcendent" for their invention and wit. That to Mr. Graham, the aeronaut, for example, is introduced as follows:—

> Up with me! up with me into the sky.
> Wordsworth,—*on a Lark!*

And the Address to the "Steam-Washing Company," which had then lately incurred much odium by intruding upon the province of the private laundress, is prefaced with a quotation from the *Merry Wives of Windsor*:—

> For shame—let the linen alone!

"Sermons in Stones," as a motto for the "Ode to Mrs. Fry in Newgate," is no less happy; and indeed the publication of this little book first made it evident that "verbal wit" (as commonly so called) was not necessarily the last resource of the would-be "funny man," but in the hands of a poet and humorist was capable of quite unforeseen uses and developments. That the imagination of the poet could not altogether escape interference from that of the wit had already made itself apparent in Hood's serious verse. It is noticeable in "Lycus the Centaur," and in the "Two Peacocks of Bedfont," where the writer, having

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to describe the downcast looks of the humbled penitent as it were feasting upon the grass, could not resist adding "like him of Babylon,"—which is witty, but strikes a false note. But on other occasions, as in the "Ode to Melancholy" and "The Song of the Shirt," Hood discovered how to make even the play upon words the minister of a really poignant pathos.

Shortly after their marriage in 1825, Hood and his wife went to live in Robert Street, Adelphi, and here for the next two years Hood applied himself diligently to cultivating every side of his genius. He lost no time in following up the success of the *Odes and Addresses* by another humorous work, this time entirely from his own hand, the *Whims and Oddities, in Prose and Verse*, issued by the publishing house of one Lupton Relfe, in Cornhill, in 1826. In this volume Hood appeared for the first time as an illustrator of his own work, in humorous designs, etched by himself. He allowed in his Preface that he exhibited this new faculty with some diffidence. "It will be seen," he wrote, "from the illustrations of the present work, that the inventor is no artist—in fact, he was never 'meant to draw,' any more than the tape-tied curtains mentioned by Mr. Pope." And in another touching paragraph of the same Preface he clearly showed that he was still working against the grain, and was still yearning to exercise his far higher gifts. "At a future time, the Press may be troubled with some things of a more serious tone and purpose—which the author has resolved upon publishing, in despite of the advice of certain critical friends. His forte, they are pleased to say, is decidedly humorous; but a gentleman cannot always be breathing his comic vein." And, indeed, the volume of *Whims and Oddities*, though ostensibly in this same vein, gave new evidence of capacity for better things. One poem it contained, "The Last Man," suggested doubtless by a combined recollection of Campbell's poem with the same title, and Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, shows much of the same tragic intensity, blended with its grim humour, that belongs to "Eugene Aram" and the serious portions of "Miss Kilmansegg."

Meantime, the *London Magazine* being now closed to him, Hood found a home for his fugitive verse in a new direction. In the year 1823 a German art-publisher and bookseller of the name of Ackermann, established in London, produced the first number of an illustrated Annual, based upon a plan long followed in Germany, called the *Forget-me-Not*, which was destined to have many imitators and successors. The first number, very German in its contents, combined with its literary contributions such statistics as we now look for in *Whitaker's Almanack* or the *Statesman's Year-Book*. These were, however, quietly dropped in succeeding issues; and the Annual remained a home for miscellaneous prose and verse of that class which we now know as Album Literature. It soon called into the field a dozen imitators, in the *Friendship's Offerings*, the *Literary Souvenirs*, the *Amulets*, and the *Keepsakes*, in which, among much mediocre and ephemeral stuff, was occasionally embalmed a stray lyric of Coleridge, or Lamb, or Blanco White. Hood made his first appearance in the *Forget-me-Not* of 1826 with a graceful poem, "The Water-Lady," suggested by a water-colour drawing of Severn's, given by Keats to Jane Reynolds. In *Friendship's Offering* for the same year he published his "Autumn," the lines beginning—

> The autumn is old,
> The sere leaves are flying,

and by far the most original lyric he had yet written, the verses—

> I remember, I remember
> The house where I was born.

In the year 1826 Hood's lyric vein was flowing at its purest and sweetest, and in the various Annuals for 1827 appeared the ballad, "It was not in the Winter"; the verses, "Time, Hope, and Memory"; the poem called "Flowers," "I will not have the Mad Clytie"; the ballad,

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"She's up and gone, the Graceless Girl"; and the charming verses, "Ruth," which adorned the *Forget-me-Not* of this year.

Hood was, in fact, preparing for the experiment which he had foreshadowed in his Preface to *Whims and Oddities*. In this year 1827 he gave to the world his first and last volume of serious verse, and appealed under his own name to the suffrages of English lovers of poetry. It was entitled *The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies, Hero and Leander, Lycus the Centaur, and other Poems*, and was announced as "By Thomas Hood, author of *Whims and Oddities*, etc. etc." The volume, produced with every advantage as to paper and print by the house of Longmans, proved an absolute failure as regarded any appreciation by the general reader. It is probable that had the volume appeared anonymously, it might have fared better. In any case it was a distinct mistake to remind the reader of *Whims and Oddities* and similar *jeux d'esprit*, on the very title-page. Hood was already widely known as a wit and humorist; and experience has often proved that when a man possesses distinct endowments of very different intellectual and artistic value, the reputation for the less important gift will eclipse that of the higher and greater. The poets of that time had no doubt as to Hood's true place among them from the first. The public remained untouched; the volume fell all but dead from the Press, and Hood's son and daughter tell us that their father bought up as many of the "remainder" copies as he was able, to save them from the Butter-shop.

The volume included two new poems of considerable length, the former of which, "The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies," was dedicated in terms of unmistakable affection to Charles Lamb. "An intimacy and dearness," Hood writes, "worthy of a much earlier date than our acquaintance can refer to, direct me at once to your name: and with this acknowledgement of your ever kind feeling towards me, I desire to record a respect and admiration

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for you as a writer, which no one acquainted with our literature, save Elia himself, will think disproportionate or misplaced. If I had not these better reasons to govern me, I should be guided to the same selection by your intense yet critical relish for the works of our great dramatist, and for that favourite play in particular which has furnished the subject of my verses." The other poem, "Hero and Leander," in the six-line stanza of Shakspeare's "Venus and Adonis," was prefaced by a sonnet to S. T. Coleridge in grateful recollection of Coleridge's praise of "the musical lines and stanzas," interspersed with the more humorous passages of the *Odes and Addresses.* The remainder of the volume was in the main a reprint of poems from the *London Magazine* and the Annuals, with one notable exception, the "Ode to Melancholy," which does not seem to have appeared before.

The subject of this poem, like that of many others in the volume, was probably suggested by an Ode of Keats on the same theme. Indeed, the fascination that Hood found in Keats extended even to the subjects of his verse. Keats has an Ode, as well as a Hymn, to Apollo, and Hood follows suit with a "Hymn to the Sun." Keats writes his superb Ode "To Autumn," and Hood has no less than three on the same theme, as well as his lines, "The Departure of Summer," written in much the same key. But the most significant contrast presented by the two poets is to be found in their respective treatment of the topic of melancholy. With Keats—in this poem all but at his very finest—the votary of melancholy is warned against seeking his goddess in her conventional symbols—wolf's-bane or nightshade, or the berries of the yew. Rather, says the poet, is she to be found in things of loveliness and perfectest delight:—

> She dwells with Beauty—Beauty that must die:
> And Joy whose hand is ever at his lips
> Bidding adieu; and aching Pleasure nigh,
> Turning to Poison while the bee-mouth sips:

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Aye, in the very temple of Delight,
  Veiled Melancholy has her sovran shrine.

The truth and beauty of this are incomparable, and Hood had doubtless felt them. Indeed, he repeats the same truth in his Ode, yet with a difference. He cannot rival the magic of Keats's numbers, but he imports into his treatment of the theme a new beauty, because a new accent—the accent of the unattainable and the uncertain issues of life and death. The Pagan treatment has given place to something spiritual:—

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O clasp me, sweet, whilst thou art mine,
And do not take my tears amiss;
For tears must flow to wash away
A thought that shows so stern as this:
Forgive, if somewhile I forget,
In woe to come, the present bliss.
As frighted Proserpine let fall
Her flowers at the sight of Dis,
Ev'n so the dark and bright will kiss.
The sunniest things throw sternest shade,
And there is ev'n a happiness
That makes the heart afraid!

But it is in the concluding stanza that a note appears, as it were of an Augustine or a Pascal, lifting the whole into a key altogether remote from that of Keats, and still more from the pessimistic humour of the Byronic school. And here, too, appears for the first time that daring use of an actual play upon words, making wit the handmaid, and not the enemy, of the keenest pathos, in which Hood stands alone:—

All things are touch'd with Melancholy,
Born of the secret soul's mistrust,
To feel her fair ethereal wings
Weigh'd down with vile degraded dust;
Even the bright extremes of joy
Bring on conclusions of disgust,
Like the sweet blossoms of the May,
Whose fragrance ends in must.
O give her, then, her tribute just,
Her sighs and tears, and musings holy!

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There is no music in the life
That sounds with idiot laughter solely ;
There's not a string attuned to mirth,
But has its chord in Melancholy.

The poem marks a stage in Hood's literary history. Melancholy had indeed early "marked him for her own." He had watched father, mother, sister and brother pass one by one away, and his own health was already such as to make a broken and suffering life all but inevitable. He had discovered that with the deepest vein in his own rich nature the public, for the moment at least, showed no sympathy. His reputation as a wit was established, and it was as a wit that the world of readers was determined to accept him. He had worked very hard during the two years succeeding his marriage. A second series of *Whims and Oddities* appeared in 1827, containing "Tim Turpin" and "The Volunteer" and other specimens of his amazing invention and fertility in punning; and at the close of the same year he broke entirely fresh ground in some Prose Tales, mostly of a sombre complexion, cleverly imitating the manner of the Oriental Story-Teller, called *National Tales*. Hood had changed his publisher more than once already, and his new venture appeared from the shop of William Harrison Ainsworth, then lately established as publisher in Old Bond Street. The stories are not without ingenuity, and are skilfully written; but a public that would not look at Hood's serious verse was still less likely to welcome such a new experiment as this. The Preface shows that the author was not without misgivings as to this result, and the latter portion is, in fact, a personal application of the moral set forth in the Ode just quoted. It is a pathetic apology for following the bent of his own nature, and delaying, if it might be, for a little while longer, the devotion to faculties that only awaken laughter. This appeal for recognition of his serious side is surely as touching as anything that Hood has left us: "I make therefore no excuses for this production, since

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it is a venture at my own peril. The serious character of the generality of the stories is a deviation from my former attempts, and I have received advice enough on that account to make me present them with some misgiving. But because I have jested elsewhere, it does not follow that I am incompetent for gravity, of which any owl is capable, or proof against melancholy, which besets even the ass. Those who can be touched by neither of these moods rank lower indeed than both of these creatures. It is from none of the player's ambition, which has led the buffoon by a rash step into the tragic buskin, that I assume the sadder humour, but because I know from certain passages that such affections are not foreign to my nature. During my short lifetime I have often been as 'sad as night,' and not like the young gentlemen of France, merely from wantonness. It is the contrast of such leaden and golden fits that lends a double relish to our days. A life of mere laughter is like music without its bass; or a picture (conceive it) of vague, unmitigated light; whereas the occasional melancholy, like these grand rich glooms of old Rembrandt, produces an incomparable effect, and a very grateful relief."

Serious verse and serious prose alike failed to please; and the courageous humorist set himself, with cheerfulness undiminished and temper unsoured by disappointment, to cultivate his more acceptable talent. For the next fifteen years, with a few notable exceptions such as "Eugene Aram" and the more thoughtful stanzas of "Miss Kilmansegg," Hood wrote no poetry save birthday verses and sonnets to his wife and children. It was not until he was within the deepening shadows of the end that his true instinct of compassion once more found vent in the strains of "The Song of the Shirt" and "The Bridge of Sighs." The Whirligig of Time has brought about its revenges, and it is by such as these that Hood lives and will live in the heart of his countrymen.

IV

(1827—1835)

At their lodgings in Robert Street, Adelphi, was born to the Hoods in 1828 their first child, a daughter, who survived her birth only a few hours. "In looking over some old papers," wrote Hood's second daughter, when compiling her father's life thirty years later, "I found a few tiny curls of golden hair, as soft as the finest silk, wrapped in a yellow and time-worn paper inscribed in my father's handwriting:—

> Little eyes that scarce did see,
> Little lips that never smiled;
> Alas! my little dear dead child,
> Death is thy father, and not me,—
> I but embraced thee, soon as he!"

Charles Lamb wrote and sent to the sorrowing parents his beautiful lines, in happiest imitation of the later Elizabethans, "On an Infant dying as soon as born," beginning:—

> I saw where in the shroud did lurk
> A curious frame of Nature's work.

The lines were printed in the following year in *The Gem*, an Annual edited that year by Hood; in which also appeared his own fine poem, "The Dream of Eugene Aram." Hood was also able to publish some verses by Sir Walter Scott and Hartley Coleridge, besides a pretended prose contribution by Lamb, entitled "The Widow," written to accompany an illustration. Lamb having failed to fulfil a promise to contribute, the copy was provided by Hood, with the concurrence of his brother humorist. About the same time Hood associated himself with the new journal, the *Athenæum*, which, having been started by James Silk Buckingham in 1828, and having more than once changed hands,

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had become the joint property of the printer and a group of men of letters, including John Hamilton Reynolds and Hood. The first Charles Wentworth Dilke became editor and co-proprietor in 1830, and within a few months resolved on the bold step of reducing the price of the journal from a shilling to fourpence. The other proprietors, distrusting the policy of such a change, parted with their interest in the journal, and Dilke and his printer remained sole proprietors. The reduction of price, combined with the ability and judgment of Dilke, soon brought about a large increase of circulation, and the ultimate success of the *Athenæum* as the leading literary journal was established. Hood continued to write for it both in verse and prose for the remainder of his life, and was throughout warmly supported by Dilke, who became his most intimate personal friend and chief correspondent.

In 1829 Hood and his wife removed to Rose Cottage, Winchmore Hill, near Enfield, and about ten miles from London. It was then quite in the country, and even at this day the cottage, with its pretty garden, is delightfully rural. Here Hood's second daughter, Frances, was born in 1830; and here, at Christmas time in the same year, was issued the first volume of the famous *Comic Annual*, destined for some dozen years to form Hood's chief occupation and means of livelihood. His past association with *Forget-me-Nots*, *Souvenirs*, and the like seems to have suggested to him to originate a humorous variety of the same type, with contributions, literary and pictorial, from various hands—the larger part, however, to be his own. He informed his readers in some prefatory words that the materials he had been collecting for a third series of *Whims and Oddities* had been thrown into the present volume, and that each future number of the *Annual* would "in the same way be associated with the whims and oddities of other authors." This plan, however, was soon abandoned, Hood's own versatility of talent proving more attractive than any

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The first of the series was dedicated to Hood's friend, Sir Francis Freeling, the Secretary of the Post Office, whose labours in that department had been of signal service to the country. Hood addresses him as "The great Patron of Letters, Foreign, General, and Two-penny, whose increasing efforts to forward the spread of intelligence as a corresponding member of all societies (and no man fills his post better) have singly, doubly, and trebly endeared him to every class." The bulk of the little volume published by Tilt of Fleet Street is from Hood's own pen, with a few contributions from his brother-in-law, Reynolds, writing under his old *London Magazine nom de guerre* of Edward Herbert; some verses by a Miss Isabel Hill and a few others; while George Cruikshank and a Miss "A. K." supplied half a dozen etchings.

The appearance of this first issue of the *Comic Annual*, presenting Hood, though not for the first time, as a punster of quite unprecedented invention, suggests the natural question why this "verbal wit," these plays upon words, place him in a quite different category from the ordinary punster of society. And the difference would seem to be this, that, Hood being a poet and humorist, imagination and humour enter into this verbal wit at its best, and impart to it a quality which makes "punning" an inadequate definition. The ordinary familiar pun—as I have said elsewhere in dealing with Hood's comic verse—when purely mechanical, depending (that is) merely upon verbal coincidence, is so easy and so unilluminating as quickly to lose all stimulating effect, and to bring on (to use a phrase of Hood's) "conclusions of disgust." In the hands of the vulgar punster the pun itself is everything—itself constitutes the wit. There is nothing underlying it or reaching beyond it. In the hands of a Hood the pun is a vehicle or instrument, the use of which takes its charm from the heart and fancy of him who wields it. The pun is the mere nucleus, around which gathers a halo of humorous fancy. Hood was, in short, much greater than a punster, because he came to the task from a higher ground. Moreover, the predominance of the pun in his humorous verse tends to close our eyes to the wide range of his invention in subjects to which he applies it. This first *Comic Annual* contains a variety of verse which all readers of Hood will remember. It has the parody on John Hamilton Reynolds's once popular drawing-room ditty :—

> Go, where the water glideth gently ever.

Hood addresses a young lady on the eve of her departure for India, where the marriage market is less overstocked than at home, and proceeds :—

> Go, where the maiden on a marriage plan goes,
> Consign'd for wedlock to Calcutta's quay—
> Where woman goes for mart, the same as mangos,
> And think of me !

The simile is so natural and so obvious—it has so little the appearance of being led up to—that when the so-called pun first flashes upon us it fairly takes our breath away. Then there is the sad story of the mysterious fate of Mrs. Bond's ducklings, which regularly disappear from the surface within a few days of their hatching :—

> Like those that copy gems, I'm thinking,
> They all were given to die sinking.

Until at last the secret comes to light when, the pond in a hot summer having dried up, certain well-fed eels turn out to have been the offenders :—

> The sight at once explained the case,
> Making the Dame look rather silly—
> The tenants of that *Eely Place*
> Had found the way to *Pick a dilly*.

Here, too, we have the disappointed angler who, discovering by sad experience that there is not a "one-pound

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prize" to be got in his "fresh-water lottery," can only come to the unwelcome conclusion that so "fishless a stream" must be "like St. Mary's, ottery." Coleridge had called one of Hood's puns "transcendent," and there are hundreds more to which the same epithet may be applied. No doubt there are many more that are far-fetched and not humorous, for Hood, as must never be forgotten in estimating his genius, had to write in illness and suffering, against the grain, for sheer bread. But the instinct of detecting verbal analogies was always strong in him, even when he had put off the harness of literary toil. He punned because he could not help it. When expecting the birth of his first child he writes to Dilke that he is "every day a step farther to becoming a parent." When introduced to the late Mr. Tegg, the publisher, he observed, "Yours is a very remarkable name, Mr. Tegg; I see that you take an *egg* after your *T*." It is the drollery of these puns, rather than their ingenuity, that gives them their peculiar flavour.

There is one legend in verse, however, the longest in the volume, which, although profuse in this same verbal wit, deserves special notice as showing how Hood could never divest himself, even when writing burlesque, of the instincts of the poet. The poem, of some thirty stanzas, is entitled "A Storm at Hastings, and the Little Unknown." The locality was one with which Hood was specially familiar. Sea air, with bathing and boating, always brought him new strength after his frequent attacks of illness, and Hastings was his chief resort. A delightful letter of Charles Lamb's will be remembered, in which he writes to call his friend's attention to the points of interest in the place, and especially the little "Loretto" church at Hollington. Hood had obviously been himself an eye-witness of the terrible storm which he depicts. He had also probably been amused by the good luck of some Cockney sportsman who won more than his share of tea-caddies and pincushions at the local lotteries and the roulette tables of the bazaars, with which wateringplaces then abounded. Out of this combination of incidents he seems to have evolved this legend of *Diablerie*, in which a mysterious stranger of dwarfish stature,—who had made a compact, *à la Faust*, with the fiend, acquiring thereby this uncanny run of luck,—was ultimately checkmated by his enemy, who took mean advantage of this sea-storm to work his revenge. The unhappy victim meets his death by drowning:—

> — on a sea excursion
> The juggling Demon, in his usual vein,
> Seized the last cast—and *nick'd* him in the *main*—

which last phrase, for the benefit of those to whom the technicalities of Hazard are unfamiliar, may be roughly explained as "got the advantage in the last throw of the dice." Now, it is hardly unfair to Hood to suggest that the capabilities of this last-named phrase first suggested the legend; but the opportunities of the situation thus decided upon at once called into play power of a quite higher sort. The puns throughout are indeed abundant and excellent, but the real effectiveness of the whole lies in its imagination and its quite singular picturesqueness and force. The description of the storm is clearly, as I have said, that of an eye-witness; and when for the moment Hood forgets to be witty, he gives us so exquisite a stanza as the following:—

> And so the tempest scowled away,—and soon
> Timidly shining thro' its skirts of jet,
> We saw the rim of the pacific moon,
> Like a bright fish entangled in a net,
> Flashing its silver sides; how sweet a boon
> Seemed her sweet light, as though it would beget
> With that fair smile a calm upon the seas,
> Peace in the sky, and coolness in the breeze.

It is to be noticed throughout the poem, as on other like occasions when Hood intermingles wit with a serious or melodramatic interest, that the purely imaginative portions are never degraded by the admixture. The stanza here employed is that of Don Juan, and the

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storm may have been in part suggested by its famous predecessor in the second canto of Byron's masterpiece; but Hood, though he loves the device of a humorous ending to a serious stanza, never appeals to a noble emotion in his readers for the express purpose of turning it to scorn as soon as awakened. In truth, Hood was by nature absolutely free from the spirit of the mocker. His nature was essentially religious, although the bigots of his day early recognised in him an enemy to be reckoned with.

A notable instance of this blending of the imagination of the wit with that of the poet, and of the power of wit to intensify a situation of the purest pathos, is afforded by some verses of Hood's that appeared, only to disappear, in a short-lived publication of the following year. In 1831 a new magazine was adventured by Edward Moxon, who had lately started as publisher through the generous assistance of Samuel Rogers. *The Englishman's Magazine*, as it was entitled, edited by Moxon himself, appeared in April of this year, but obtained so little support that it was discontinued in the following October. This *torso* of a magazine, now exceedingly rare, is noticeable for having published several papers by Charles Lamb and a review by Arthur Hallam of Tennyson's first volume of poems (1830). But it also contained two poems by Hood, one of which has become justly famous, the beautiful stanzas entitled "The Death-Bed":—

> We watched her breathing through the night,
>   Her breathing soft and low,
> As in her breast the wave of life
>   Kept heaving to and fro.
>
> So silently we seemed to speak,
>   So slowly moved about,
> As we had lent her half our powers
>   To eke her living out.
>
> Our very hopes belied our fears,
>   Our fears our hopes belied,
> We thought her dying when she slept,
>   And sleeping when she died.

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For when the morn came dim and sad,
And chill with early showers,
Her quiet eyelids closed—she had
Another morn than ours.

At what date these verses were written remains uncertain. Hood's son and daughter were under the impression that they were prompted by the death of a sister of Hood's, who did not long survive the death of her mother in 1821. This, however, affords no clue to the date of composition, and Hood's children assigned them conjecturally to the year 1824. The fact that they had appeared in print in 1831 seems to have escaped observation altogether (so little attention had Moxon's periodical attracted); and the first edition of Hood's serious poems after his death in 1845 included the verses among others as then printed for the first time. The other poem of Hood's in the Magazine, called "Anticipation," (a variation of his old customary theme of the melancholy lying at the root of all human joys), has hitherto escaped notice altogether, and is included in the present edition for the first time.

About this year Hood became personally known to the sixth Duke of Devonshire, apparently through a presentation copy of the *Comic Annual* for 1830; and the acquaintance was further strengthened by Hood's felicitous compliance with the Duke's request that Hood would furnish him with a set of fancy book titles for a library door at Chatsworth. The second Annual, for 1831, was dedicated to the Duke, who proved then and afterwards one of Hood's most staunch and generous friends. The *Comic Annual* had already become a success, first and second series passing into second editions, and further proving their popularity by calling into existence a crop of imitators. Hood playfully remonstrates with these in the preface to the volume of 1831. The *New Comic* was indeed, as Hood pointed out, a very untradesmanlike "conveyance," and an "uncandid candidate" for public favour; while the

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Comic Offering (he said) was a very confession of inferiority, inasmuch as it only "offered" to be comic. The imitators do not seem to have long kept the field; and Mr. Tilt continued to publish Hood's *Annual* until the year 1834, after which it passed into the hands of another firm.

In 1832 the Hoods migrated from Winchmore Hill to Lake House, Wanstead, which was their home for the next three years. The change of residence did not prove a great success. The house, as its name implied, was built upon an island in one of the many artificial pieces of water in the park attached to the magnificent mansion of the Tylneys. The mansion, erected by Sir Richard Child, afterwards Earl of Tylney, in 1715, had been finally dismantled and pulled down, owing to the reckless extravagance of its latest proprietor, in 1822. Lake House had been an outlying banqueting-hall, used for fêtes and such entertainments; and being in its internal arrangements very little suited for a dwelling-house, was probably let, after its original occupation was gone, at an insignificant rent. But water was about it everywhere, not favourable to Hood's rheumatic ailments; and visits to the sea for recovery's sake became more and more necessary. While at Wanstead Hood wrote his single three-volumed novel, *Tylney Hall;* borrowing the title from the noble family who had first inhabited Wanstead House, and using the picturesque and romantic scenery of Epping Forest as the background of his story. The serious interest is melodramatic, relieved by a comic under-plot, dealing with the ever-popular topic of a Londoner's adventures and mistakes when first set down amid rural surroundings. The types of character are in the main conventional, drawn rather from Hood's omnivorous novel-reading than from any fresh observation of life. *Tylney Hall* is, in fact, a Minerva Press novel, elevated throughout by the charm of the poet and humorist. Much of the book had been task-work to him. He had little faith in his competence to write sentimental

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fiction. "Raby and Grace are failures," he wrote to his friend Dilke, referring to the story. "I can't write love scenes: as a fellow said at my piece at the Surrey, 'I can act the part, but I forget the words!'" And then, too, the dominant habit of punning could not be restrained, and appears in season and out of season. The baronet of the story receives an important letter, handed to him in the hunting-field; and we are told, "the baronet broke the cover—the fox at that moment doing the same thing." And yet, underlying all conventionalism and surface drollery there is felt the indefeasible charm of Hood's own true temperament—his sense of the *lacrymae rerum*, and his tenderness and reverence for all things human. And the result is to place the story in a category quite removed from the drawing-room romance of the period just preceding the appearance of Dickens and Thackeray. And that singular sense of *fatefulness* which, as we have seen, ever haunted Hood's path, and even dictated the subjects of his most humorous drawings, appears here in the one really impressive character of the story—the tragic and almost painful figure of the poor post-boy, "Unlucky Joe," whose life is crushed at every turn by disaster or untoward chance.

Tylney Hall was published at the close of the year 1834. Meantime, the *Comic Annual* had appeared more or less regularly, according as Hood's always uncertain health permitted. His rivals and imitators seem most ungenerously to have traded upon the knowledge of this uncertainty, and to have insinuated to their own public that it would sooner or later bring Hood's *Annual* to an end. In the Preface to the volume for 1833 Hood enters his protest, with as much good-humour as wit, against these veiled attacks, especially from a Miss Louisa Sheridan, who edited the *Comic Offering*. "For the fourth time," Hood writes, "I come forth with my volume, which, thanks to mild critical weather, has now stood through three winters, and may

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therefore lay claim, by Mr. Loudoun's permission, to the designation of a 'Hardy Annual.' Those only who have been pressed to death by a newspaper, and made to walk through a Valley of the Shadow of Death, haunted by printers' devils, can estimate the ghostlike pleasure I feel in thus appearing again in sheets. Owing to an obscure sentence in the *Comic Offering*, partaking rather of Burke than Sheridan, my literary if not bodily departure was prematurely announced in the *Herald*, the *Atlas*, and the *Metropolitan*:—

> 'Thrice the Banshee cried.'

But I have no inclination to be passively tied neck and heels, and thrown into the Lake of Darkness, like the gauger at the command of the rantipole wife of Rob Roy. I have seen but thirty-five summers, and with regard to my constitution am strictly a Conservative. As Wordsworth says of a little child, I feel my life in every limb; and indeed I know on high authority that I am as nearly related to the 'Undying One' as Miss Sheridan herself. That lady must therefore be content to 'live and let live' a little longer; and if other parties have wilfully persisted in throwing the pall over me, they will find by this volume that they have neither gained *their* end, nor mine."

But notwithstanding the cheerful tone of this, as of all Hood's public utterances, and the fact that as yet his humorous vein of invention showed no signs of failure, clouds were gathering about his path. Debts were accumulating, and apparently from no direct fault of Hood or his wife. There is no evidence that they were at this or any time thoughtless or extravagant; but attacks of illness were frequent, and ill-health cost money, if only because it brought with it the necessity for frequent absences from home. In January 1835 their only son was born, and a long and dangerous illness of Mrs. Hood was the sequel. She was tended with loving devotion by her husband; but differences and

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complications arose between Hood and his wife's family; and the combination of these anxieties with a growing difficulty as to the means of bare subsistence seems for a while to have brought Hood almost to the verge of distraction. An unpublished letter of excessive length, written during this crisis to his friend Dilke, lies before me, almost too piteous in the anguish of mind it reveals even for quotation. The one gleam of comfort afforded was that the good Dr. Elliot of Stratford—thenceforth Hood's most loyal physician and counsellor for the rest of his life—had spoken hopeful words as to his wife's recovery. "The light of my hearth is not extinguished," Hood writes, "and I delight in the fresh blaze up of the old fuel of love. . . . It will gratify you both to know that Jane mentioned you both repeatedly, in her delirium even, for the heart looks after the head in its wanderings, like a mother after a stray child."

At the end of 1834, Hood's daughter informs us, her father, "in common with many others," suffered heavy loss through the failure of a firm. What firm this was does not appear, or the nature of Hood's transactions with it. It was certainly on this occasion not due to his publisher, though all through his career Hood seems to have suffered from business entanglements connected with his books. Hood, it would appear, was advised by many to become bankrupt; but he chose to face the future without that protection, and to seek by hard work and economy to wipe out his obligations. With this view, after parting with all his personal effects for the benefit of his creditors, he resolved to live abroad for a few years. In March 1835, leaving his wife on the fair path of recovery, Hood left England for Rotterdam on his way to seek some cheap and pleasant refuge for his family on the Rhine. He was so unfortunate as to make this voyage in the first week of March, when a memorable storm arose, placing the steam-vessel, the *Lord Melville*, for some hours in grave danger of shipwreck, and exposing Hood to suffering and exhaustion

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from the effects of which his children believed that he never recovered. "I had a dreadful passage to Rotterdam," he wrote to his wife from Coblenz; "Wednesday night was an awful storm, and Thursday morning was worse. I was *sea-sick* and *frightened* at sea for the first time; so you will suppose it was no trifle: in fact it was unusually severe. I went up at midnight and found *four* men at the helm, hint enough for me, so I went down again; and in the morning a terrific sea tore the whole four from the helm, threw the captain as far as the funnel (twenty paces) and the three men after him. Had it not come *direct aft* it would have swept them into the sea—boat, skylights, and everything, in short—and have left us a complete wreck. Eleven others miscarried that same night near at hand, so you may thank the cherub I told you of; but such a storm has seldom been known."

Hood remained only a day and night in Rotterdam; but this was his first sight of a foreign town, and in spite of sea-storm and pecuniary anxiety, it brought back his old happy and hopeful mood. The impressions made are preserved for us in the cheerful lines he sent home at once to his wife, to be printed in the *Athenæum* of a few days later:—

Before me lie dark waters
In broad canals and deep,
Whereon the silver moonbeams
Sleep, restless in their sleep;
A sort of vulgar Venice
Reminds me where I am;
Yes, yes, you are in England,
And I'm at Rotterdam.

And so on, with skilful manipulations of the final recurring rhyme, until it reaches the passionate greeting at the close—(Hood's letters to his wife, whether in prose or verse, were always those of a lover):—

Then here it goes, a bumper—
The toast it shall be mine,

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In schiedam, or in sherry,
Tokay, or hock of Rhine ;
It well deserves the brightest,
Where sunbeam ever swam—
"The girl I love in England"
I drink at Rotterdam !

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(1835-1840)

Hood finally chose lodgings for his family in the Castor Hof at Coblenz, where Mrs. Hood and the children joined him at the end of March. Coblenz, sixty years since, was a charming retreat. As yet only the picturesque bridge of boats spanned the Rhine between the city and the noble fortress of Ehrenbreitstein. Railways were not, and the nymph of the Lorelei had not yet been driven from her romantic heights by the tunnelling of the rock below. The beauty of the Rhine and Moselle scenery might have proved a real stimulus to Hood's poetic fancy, but he allowed it to find vent only in two or three short lyrics, afterwards included in his *Up the Rhine.* Many clever descriptive letters from Mrs. Hood to her friends the Dilkes, printed in the memoir by the son and daughter, give a pleasant picture of their surroundings, and of the domestic troubles arising from ignorance of the language and the impositions of their tradesmen—all of which they bore with characteristic cheerfulness. Then, too, the Rhine was becoming a favourite route for English tourists, and they were in the way of seeing from time to time English friends, such as the Dilkes and the Elliots. An accidental acquaintance with a Prussian officer, Lieutenant von Franck, ripened into a very close intimacy, founded on many common tastes both in literature and in sport, notably in that of angling, and proved a great gain both to Hood and the

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whole household. Hood's health indeed did not improve. Attacks of hæmorrhage from the lungs seem to have become more frequent; and the German doctors, rightly or wrongly, treated them by frequent bleeding from his arm. He was well enough, however, to enjoy a pleasant excursion as far as Berlin, touching many other interesting cities and towns *en route*, by travelling as his friend Franck's companion with the regiment—but he paid the penalty by a rather worse than usual lung attack on his return. The frequent letters he wrote during this trip to his wife—his "dearest and best"—show how his heart, untravelled, turned ever to her and to his children.

Meantime, he worked with unflagging energy at the one important literary production of each year—the *Comic Annual*—in which everything was now from his own hand, prose and verse as well as the humorous woodcuts. He wrote also occasional reviews and verses for the *Athenæum*, with which journal his friend Dilke allowed him to keep in constant touch. And all the while he was collecting material for the volume which was later to embody his German experiences, his *Up the Rhine*. Hood's original intention had been to remain abroad only two years, and to return to England in 1837, for he felt his expatriation keenly. But his financial difficulties failed to allow of this; and when 1837 arrived, Hood found himself unable to return to London; and at the same time found the distance of Coblenz from England an increasing difficulty, owing to the expense and delays in the despatch and receipt of "copy" and wood-blocks for the *Comic Annuals* and other literary work. Under these circumstances he resolved to remove for a while nearer England, to some seaside place in Belgium. "My present idea," he writes to his friend Franck in April 1837, "is *per* Cologne and Aix to Ostend or Antwerp, when I shall be able to get over to England in a few hours at any time, if necessary; and should I get strength to travel, I can see something of Belgium and France. I rather incline

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to Ostend on account of the sea air, which always does me great good." And on the 28th of June we find him writing to his friend Mr. Wright, the engraver, who managed the business part of the *Comic Annuals* in London, that the family had just reached Ostend, and were quartered in the Rue Longue. They had travelled by steamer to Cologne, and then taken coach to Liège, where they were entertained by a friend, M. Nagelmacher, at his country seat. Thence they journeyed by Brussels to Ghent, and finally through Bruges to Ostend.

Here the Hoods remained three years, diversified by occasional brief visits to England. The change of residence was to prove in the end very disastrous to Hood's health. "My father's constitution," his daughter tells us, "was as unfitted for the miasmatic swamps and mists of Ostend as for the alternate extremes of heat and cold at Coblenz"; and it unfortunately proved that damp, and malaria, and bad water, as well as an unhealthy house, were in the end to reduce Hood to a condition from which ultimate recovery was impossible. But for the moment the breezes of "ocean, his old love," revived him; and one of the first fruits of this stimulus of scene and air was a poem which appeared in the *Athenæum* of 12th August, the famous "Ode to Rae Wilson." The gentleman thus addressed was a Scotsman, a native of Paisley, who had been bred to the law; but having been left a large fortune by an uncle, had abandoned that profession and devoted his life to foreign travel, the results of which he gave to the world in successive volumes of very slight value of any sort, and of the feeblest literary quality. Mr. Wilson's religion was of the narrowest puritanical type; and the main object of his travel was to glorify Protestant England at the expense of the benighted Romanist or Mahommedan. Each of his books contained, besides its main subject, light and airy digressions upon the current literature of the day, criticised always from the same exclusive standpoint, and unmitigated by even a grain of humour. Hood had been for some years a chief object of his virulent contempt—partly because his satire had never spared the bigots of the day, and partly, no doubt, because he was a writer in the *Athenæum*, a journal which had uniformly rated Mr. Wilson's productions at their true value. In one pleasing passage, indeed, Mr. Wilson had indicated Hood, with delicate allusion to his Christian name, as that journal's "favourite Tom-fool." In 1835 Wilson had published his *Records of a Route through France and Italy, with Sketches of Catholicism*, and in the course of this single volume had attacked Hood no less than three times. Hood had on several occasions expressed his opinion in verse on Sir Andrew Agnew and his "Lord's Day Observance Bill"; and in discussing the "absence of the Christian Sabbath" in Paris, Rae Wilson refers in a note to Hood, who, it appears, in pleading for the right of the poor man not to be debarred on Sunday from pleasures which were freely open to and enjoyed by the rich, had written the line:—

> After creation should come re-creation.

"I wonder," adds Mr. Rae Wilson, "what Johnson would have said of the man who could utter, not only so despicable, but so truly infamous a pun as that." Later in the volume Rae Wilson goes out of his way to refer to "such laboured burlesques of character and manners as 'Tylney Hall,' things about as respectable in literature as mountebanks and merry-andrews are in society"; and finally describes Hood as "gratuitously and ambitiously irreverent."

It cannot of course be gainsaid that Hood had shown scant respect for a school of religionists, very prominent in his day, with whom he had been brought in painful contact among members of his own family. He had hit hard, and could not well expect to be let alone in return. It is clear that his trenchant and not always discriminating satire had raised up many enemies, and that "infidel" was one of the commonest of epithets

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launched against him. Now Hood was no infidel, but a man of really religious nature—humble, patient, and affectionate—who revolted against that vulgar Pharisaism which was the chief type of religion that met his view. It is impossible to read his own more thoughtful verse without discovering that religious trust, as well as thoughtfulness, was growing in him to the latest day of his life. He could well have afforded to leave his enemy alone; but perhaps the personality of Mr. Wilson appealed to him also irresistibly as a humorist. And now in 1837 this writer had appeared with two fresh volumes, *Notes Abroad and Rhapsodies at Home*, in which not only was Hood again held up to execration, but a more exalted victim appeared in the person of Sir Walter Scott. Years were certainly not bringing Mr. Wilson the philosophic mind, or chastening his literary style; and the following remarks on a classical passage in *Marmion* may serve finally to show the quality of the man:—

"Even Sir Walter Scott himself says—

> Love rules the court, the camp, the grove,
> And men below, and saints above,
> For love is Heaven, and Heaven is love!

And this, it must be confessed, is very neatly and antithetically expressed; that it is particularly moral, sensible, or decent, is more than can be affirmed. On the contrary, it is just the sort of flippant stuff that would do for a Vauxhall song. It exhibits such a glorious confusion of ideas that I suspect the poet must have been rather bozzy at the time he penned it, else hardly would it have been possible for him to jumble the chaste amours of the camp with the spiritual raptures of the saints,"—with much more elegant sarcasm of the same sort. Hood is again attacked for his "horribly indecent allusions to Holy Writ"—the allusion chosen on this occasion to illustrate the charge being a description of a certain sow, from whose jaw protruded a sprout of cabbage,

> as the dove so staunch
> For peace supports an olive branch.

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Mr. Wilson's new work was reviewed in the *Athenæum*, in the first week in August, with more than usual severity; and an intimation was added that an Ode to Mr. Wilson would appear in the following week.

The ode is among the best known of Hood's productions; and every one will remember with what mingled good sense and good wit he justifies himself in a prefatory letter to the Editor of the *Athenæum:* "In some cases the dove unquestionably stands for the Divine Spirit; but the same bird is also a lay representative of the peace of this world, and as such has figured, time out of mind, in allegorical pictures. . . . But I am possibly in error. It is the female swine, perhaps, that is profaned in the eyes of the Oriental tourist. Men find strange ways of marking their intolerance; and the spirit is certainly strong enough in Mr. W.'s works, to set up a creature as sacred, in sheer opposition to the Mussulman, with whom she is a beast of abomination. It would only be going the whole sow." The ode in general is too familiar to bear quotation, but one beautiful passage, reflecting a recent experience of travel by one who looked on nature with other eyes than those of Mr. Rae Wilson, acquires new interest when read in this connection:—

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Say, was it to my spirit's gain or loss,
One bright and balmy morning, as I went
From Liège's lovely environs to Ghent,
If hard by the wayside I found a cross
That made me breathe a prayer upon the spot—
While nature of herself, as if to trace
The emblem's use, had trailed around its base
The blue significant Forget-me-not?
Methought the claims of Charity to urge
More forcibly, along with Faith and Hope,
The pious choice had pitched upon the verge
    Of a delicious slope,
Giving the eye much variegated scope;—
"Look round," it whisper'd, "on that prospect rare,
These vales so verdant, and those hills so blue:
Enjoy the sunny world, so fresh and fair,
But" (how the simple legend pierced me through!)
    "'PRIEZ POUR LES MALHEUREUX.'"

As a whole, the "Ode to Rae Wilson" may not be one of Hood's happiest productions, but no other single poem of his contains more notable passages, serious and humorous, that have long passed into household words. The wit is here and there up to Hood's highest level. Rae Wilson having abundantly proved that his chief solace in travel was the chance of pouring contempt upon the superstitions of Romanism, Hood compares him to a "skittish Scottish bull" pursuing "an old woman in a scarlet cloak." Then, too, there is the felicitous

> Who would rush at a benighted man,
> And give him two black eyes for being blind?

and the incomparable

> But you have been to Palestine—alas!
>   Some minds improve by travel, others rather
> Resemble copper wire, or brass,
>   Which gets the narrower by going farther!

The ode has attained a celebrity rather independent of its literary merits; and many may be heard to quote it gleefully as if it actually spoke the last word on the issues between Hood and the representative religious teachers of his day. Hood had not, it must be admitted, had much experience of the nobler side of that evangelical faith which was still in his day the dominant form of religious earnestness. He had come in contact, both at home and in society, with a decadent species of it which appeals directly to the satirist. And he shared the mistake, common with the humorist, of confounding the narrowest and most bigoted section of the party with the party as a whole. Such characters as Burns's "Holy Willie," or the pious Banker with the oily smile in Tennyson's "Sea Dreams," naturally excited his indignation and disgust. But Hood's contempt for the religious world of his day must always be accepted with some careful limitations.

In the spring of 1838 Hood was busy with a reissue of his old "Comic Annuals," in monthly parts, under the

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title of *Hood's Own.* To these he contributed a considerable amount of new matter, the most important being the "Literary Reminiscences" already referred to. The July number contained a portrait of Hood, which the artist, J. F. Lewis, made a special voyage to Ostend to paint. It is reproduced in the present edition, and, on the authority of Hood's children, was an excellent likeness. In the meantime, Hood was continuously at work upon the new Comic Annuals, which duly appeared in 1838 and 1839. But this double labour of *Hood's Own* and the Annuals was telling upon his gradually failing health. The disease from which he suffered made steady progress. Ostend, otherwise fairly liked by him as a residence, proved absolutely unfavourable to his maladies. Fever and hæmorrhage were continually confining him to bed, and causing interruptions to his work. His letters to his friends, and his prefaces to the Annuals, abound in references to these ever-recurring difficulties of his task. To one friend he writes that the doctors have discovered that his heart is "hung too low." "Never mind," adds the cheerful invalid, "YOU shall always find it in the right place!"

He still found time, however, to gratify wife and child with an occasional sonnet or other verse, to testify his never-failing affection. It was in September 1839 that he wrote the birthday verses to his little daughter, with the touching stanza—

So may'st thou live, dear! many years,
In all the bliss that life endears,
Not without smiles, nor yet from tears
    Too strictly kept:
When first thy infant littleness
I folded in my fond caress,
The greatest proof of happiness
    Was this—I wept.

In December 1839, he wrote the Preface to his *Up the Rhine*, on which he had been for long engaged, and the volume appeared before Christmas.

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Its success was immediate; and his children tell us that its first edition of 1500 copies was exhausted in the first fortnight. The book, written in the form of letters from an English family travelling on the Rhine, is admittedly based upon the corresponding adventures of the family in Smollett's *Humphrey Clinker*. John Galt, in his *Ayrshire Legatees*, had already availed himself of the same model, but with qualifications for prose fiction and character-drawing far superior to Hood's. In attempting fiction, Hood was in truth using his left hand. His types of character, at least in middle-class life, are for the most part conventional, and fail to convince. The servant Martha Penny, who corresponds to Smollett's Winifred Jenkins, is the only diverting character in the book; and even there the amusement is chiefly due to the puns and other verbal humour incident to the well-worn resource of eccentric spelling.

The new work, however, was received with general welcome, and must have brought some one a handsome profit (it was published, I think, at half a guinea), but there was nothing in store for poor Hood but disappointment. His publishers of many years, A. H. Baily and Co., of Cornhill, failed to satisfy the author, and legal proceedings against the firm became necessary in the months that followed. The result during the early part of 1840 was that Hood was again in dire straits for money; while his declining health made it more and more uncertain as to his powers of earning in the future. During one of his short visits to England in April of this year, where he was as usual the guest of his faithful friend, Charles Wentworth Dilke, he writes to his wife at Ostend: "I find my position a very cruel one—after all my struggles, to be, as I am, almost moneyless, and with a very dim prospect of getting any, but by the sheer exercise of my pen. What is to be done in the meantime is a question I ask myself without any answer but—Bruges Jail! At the very moment of being free of Baily, am I tied else-

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This visit to London had apparently been arranged at the suggestion of Dr. Elliot of Stratford, who was alarmed by the medical reports of Hood's condition, and to whose house Hood repaired after this first week with the Dilkes. While there he was attacked with so severe a return of blood-spitting as further to alarm Dr. Elliot, who allowed Mrs. Hood to be summoned from Ostend. A letter from Mrs. Hood in the following August explains to their old friend Lieutenant Franck, how this latest illness of her husband's had made it absolutely necessary that they should leave Ostend, and settle once more in England. "At a few hours' notice, leaving the dear children in care of our friend here, I set off to London in the middle of May. Our friends the Elliots welcomed me most kindly, and I found that Hood had been so carefully and tenderly nursed by them, that my coming would add but little to his comforts. . . . Dr. Elliot gave his opinion that Hood could never be so well as in England, so we made up our minds to come and reside here again; but having much to arrange, we could not return for the children till about a month ago; which you, who know us, will suppose we gladly did, having been longer absent from them than we had been ever before."

Hood obtained the necessary supplies for the expense of leaving Ostend, and bringing his family to England, by parting with the one copyright he held—that of *Tylney Hall*—to Mr. Bentley of New Burlington Street. Mrs. Hood, in the letter just cited, writes from Camberwell where they had taken up their abode; and is able to add the gratifying intelligence that her husband was under an engagement with Mr. Colburn to write articles for the *New Monthly Magazine*, with the right reserved of separate publication hereafter. With the double prospect of regular employment and of more favourable conditions of health and comfort, Fortune seemed at last to be smiling on Thomas Hood.

VI

(1840—1845)

On arriving in London the Hoods established themselves in lodgings at Camberwell—at No. 7 Union Row, in the High Street—not far from the Green. They were probably attracted to this neighbourhood by the circumstance that Dr. Robert Elliot, brother of their old friend at Stratford, was in practice as a physician hard by. For the second time Hood was fortunate in his medical attendant; and Robert Elliot, like his brother, remained for the rest of Hood's life his devoted counsellor and friend. Under his care, and the more favourable conditions of climate and food, Hood's health for the time surprisingly improved, and he was able to devote himself in good heart to his work for Mr. Colburn on the *New Monthly Magazine.* In its pages, during 1840 and 1841, appeared, under the inappropriate heading of "Rhymes for the Times," the wonderful "History of Miss Kilmansegg," besides the "Tale of a Trumpet" and other less important pieces in verse and prose. Meantime, the lawsuit with his former publisher, Mr. Baily, was running its weary course, and no profits seem to have reached the author from the sale of *Up the Rhine.* In the winter of 1840-41 Hood's health was again failing; but in February he reports himself to Dr. Elliot of Stratford as better, and as having just "killed Miss Kilmansegg instead of her killing *him!*" He also has to report that the Royal Literary Fund had, unsolicited, voted him a grant of £50, and that he had declined it "for many and well-weighed reasons." The letter to the Secretary of the Fund in which Hood declined its bounty is given in full in the Memoir of Hood's friend, C. W. Dilke, prefixed to the "Papers of a Critic." "My position at present," Hood writes, "is an easy one compared with that of some eight months ago, when out of heart, helpless, spiritless, sleepless, childless. I have now a home in my own country, and my little ones sit at my hearth. I smile sometimes, and even laugh. For the same benign Providence that gifted me with the power of amusing others has not denied me the ability of entertaining myself. . . . My embarrassment and bad health are of such standing that I am become as it were seasoned. For the last six years I have been engaged in the same struggle without sinking, receiving, or requiring any pecuniary assistance whatever. My pen and pencil procured not only enough for my own wants, but to form a surplus besides—a sort of literary fund of my own, which at this moment is 'doing good by stealth' to a person, not exactly of learning or genius, but whom, according to the example of your excellent society, I will forbear to name."

At the time this assistance was declined, there can be no doubt that Hood was very poor. Among other ways of adding to his scanty resources he was writing occasional reviews of books in the *Athenæum*. In 1840 it fell to his lot to review the first volume of *Master Humphrey's Clock*, comprising the earlier chapters of the "Old Curiosity Shop." Some years afterwards, when writing the Preface to the first cheap edition of his story (in 1848), Dickens touchingly refers to this Review:—"I have a mournful pride in one recollection associated with 'little Nell.' While she was yet upon her wanderings, not then concluded, there appeared in a literary journal an essay of which she was the principal theme, so earnestly, so eloquently, and tenderly appreciative of her, and of all her shadowy kith and kin, that it would have been insensibility in me, if I could have read it without an unusual glow of pleasure and encouragement. Long afterwards, and when I had come to know him well, and to see him, stout of heart, going slowly down into his grave, I knew the writer of that essay to be Thomas Hood." It seems to have been not long after the appearance of this Review that Dickens and Hood became

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personally intimate. In a letter of Hood's, in April 1841, he tells his friend Franck that he and "Boz" are already "very good friends"; and thereafter the names of Dickens and his family occur frequently in the Memoir by Hood's son and daughter, as among those who greatly cheered his declining years.

In August 1841 Theodore Hook died. He had been Editor of the *New Monthly*, and Mr. Colburn at once offered the vacant post to Hood. Hook had received a salary of £300 a year, and Hood stipulated for the same. It was the one piece of good fortune—the first and only opportunity of a settled income—he was ever to enjoy, and great was the happiness in his home. Mrs. Hood at once wrote the good news to their friends at Stratford:—"Mr. Colburn's Mr. Shoberl has been here to offer Hood the editorship of the *New Monthly*. There's good news! I have scarcely wits to write to you; but you, our kindest and best friends in adversity, must be the first to rejoice with us at better prospects. . . . We have had some anxiety whether Mr. Colburn, with the disadvantages of Hood's having been of late unable to do anything for the Magazine, would consider him competent. I have thought of it night and day, and truly thankful am I to God for the blessing." And, two days later, she adds, "The prospect of a certainty makes me feel 'passing rich.' Poverty has come so very near of late, that, in the words of Moore's song, 'Hope grew sick as the witch drew nigh.'" Hood, too, writes in the same strain of happiness, and better days seemed in store for them all. Anxiety being now relieved, Hood's health and spirits as usual improved. At the end of 1841 the family removed to furnished rooms in Elm Tree Road, St. John's Wood. In the meantime the *Comic Annual*, which had been suspended for two years, was resuscitated through the publishing house of Mr. Colburn, the contents being chiefly reprints from Hood's contributions to the Magazine. "Miss Kilmansegg" reappeared, with illustrations by John Leech, then just rising into fame

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through his drawings in *Punch*. The "Friend in Need," and the "Tale of a Trumpet," with a few comic cuts and some unimportant prose sketches, completed the volume, which had reached a second edition by February 1842, and still farther contributed to raise Hood's hopes for the future. This year was indeed to prove almost the happiest and most prosperous of Hood's life. His pecuniary circumstances had improved—though his law-suit with Baily still dragged its slow length along—and his position as editor of a leading magazine introduced him to new and congenial literary society. The summer of this year was fine and warm, and Hood was able to pay frequent visits in the country with his little son; and, after his long exile, to enjoy with new zest, what he had always dearly loved, the rural scenery of his native land. In the autumn he even managed a trip to Scotland, visiting his old haunts in Dundee, and afterwards seeing Edinburgh, where he met with a general welcome, making many new friends—Dickens having given him an introduction to Jeffrey, whom he visited at Craigcrook. He returned to London refreshed, and in apparently improved health; but new troubles awaited him, and thenceforth life was never free from labour and anxiety until the end. Differences were arising between him and Colburn. Who was to blame, if either, we cannot tell. It may well have been that Hood, with little business faculty generally, had no particular capacity for that of editing. In any case, the relations between them ended (not amicably), and Hood projected a magazine of his own, to begin with the New Year.

But before the old year closed Hood was to attain at one bound a reputation at once higher and wider than he had yet won. In the Christmas Number of *Punch* for 1843 appeared—with a whole page to itself, and enclosed within a head and side border of grotesque figures, as befitted a Christmas number—the famous "Song of the Shirt." The subject of underpaid needlewomen had recently been brought prominently before public atten-

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tion by an incident in the Police Courts duly recorded in the *Times* of 26th October. A poor widow, with two infant children, was charged with having pawned certain articles of clothing belonging to her employer, a Jewish slop-seller in the Minories. She was paid to make men's trousers at the rate of sevenpence each. Her employer's foreman, who attended at the Police Court, took very lofty ground, and asserted that if the woman worked steadily she could make a very good living; and, on being pressed by the magistrate as to what he meant by the phrase, explained that she could earn seven shillings a week. A somewhat similar case, that immediately succeeded this at the same court, still further emphasised the dire necessities of the unhappy workwomen. A poor sempstress was charged with the same offence of pawning; and it was proved in evidence that the employer put shirts out to be made at three halfpence each; but that in this particular case a "middle-woman," who took the contract, further reduced the wage to a penny-farthing. The *Times* of the following day had an eloquent and indignant leader on the subject, and for a while at least much public sympathy was aroused.

Hood had been an occasional contributor to *Punch* both in verse and prose since that periodical had passed into the hands of Messrs. Bradbury and Evans; but it was almost by accident that the "Song of the Shirt" made its first appearance there. The author only sent it to *Punch* after it had been rejected in other quarters. In enclosing the poem to Mark Lemon, Hood expressed his doubt whether it was quite suitable, adding that it had been refused by three papers, and that he was "sick of the sight of it." And indeed when Mark Lemon laid the verses before the staff of *Punch* at the weekly dinner, the majority were adverse to its publication, on the ground of its inappropriateness to a comic periodical! The editor's wiser judgment, however, prevailed, and the poem appeared in the Christmas number. Its success was immediate and decisive. It was quoted by all the

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papers, headed by the *Times*. The authorship was the subject of much wild guessing, though Dickens, among others, at once attributed it to its right source. The verses were translated into French and German; and were parodied times without number. "But," adds Hood's daughter, "what delighted, and yet touched my father most deeply, was that the poor creatures, to whose sorrows and sufferings he had given such eloquent voice, seemed to adopt its words as their own, by singing them about the streets to a rude air of their own adaptation."

Time has confirmed the verdict then passed. In its kind the poem is a masterpiece; in the first place, because of its profound sympathy, which is beyond suspicion. There were a hundred minor poets in Hood's day who could have written creditable and pathetic verses on the same subject; but not one, it may be safely said, who could have produced the effect achieved by Hood. It may perhaps even be said that no one could have so moved others who had not himself trodden the kindred path of poverty, and of anxiety for those he loved. And in the next place, the verses display that blending of pathos and wit in which Hood had then, as now, no rival. There is hardly a stanza which, if analysed, will not be found to take its point from an antithesis or play upon words that is purely witty. Indeed, the most poignantly pathetic stanza of the whole finds its climax in a pun, and the pun is most assuredly justified by its success:—

   Work—work—work,
In the dull December light,
   And work—work—work,
When the weather is warm and bright—
While underneath the eaves
   The brooding swallows cling,
As if to show me their sunny backs
   And twit me with the spring.

And this pity—ever-deepening pity for the sufferings of his kind—was to prove the chief motive force of Hood's worthiest work for the remaining few months of his

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life; although, in touching contrast with his own worthier aspirations, he felt constrained to announce his forthcoming venture, under the title of *Hood's Magazine, and Comic Miscellany*. His public expected him first and foremost to be comic; and he saw no course except to comply. The prospectus was issued at the close of the year 1843, with a preliminary list of names of the probable contributors. They comprised the usual magazine writers of the day, such as Mrs. S. C. Hall, William and Mary Howitt, Mrs. Norton, Barry Cornwall, with two or three of greater note, including Dickens and Robert Browning. The opening address by Hood was ablaze with puns, of greater or less brilliancy; and concluded by commending the Magazine "to those enlightened judges, the Reviewers—and to that impartial jury—too vast to pack in any case—the British Public."

Struggling against the steady progress of an incurable malady,—organic disease of the heart,—attended by many complications, Hood worked his hardest to make his opening number a success. He provided from his own hand ten or twelve of the articles (including Reviews), in verse and prose, amounting to about half the entire number. Of these by far the most remarkable was the poem of the "Haunted House," written to accompany a steel engraving from an oil painting by Thomas Creswick. That the picture preceded the poem and suggested it, there can be no doubt whatever; for Hood was in no circumstances to commission such a work from an artist of Creswick's already high distinction. In the poem Hood has followed the leading of the artist in many details; but under his hand the theme developed and became an absolutely independent creation. The poem and its illustration at once made their mark, and the first number of the Magazine was received with general favour. But, as usual, difficulties and anxieties attended the production even from the outset. Remembering his old troubles with publishers, Hood had rashly resolved to dispense with them altogether; and the Magazine was

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issued from an office of its own in the Adelphi, until afterwards transferred to a medical bookseller in the Strand. Then, too, the supposed "capitalist" with whom Hood had associated himself turned out to be a man of straw; and from the first Hood found himself crippled for want of capital to continue the publication. The printer was changed more than once; and Hood's continual attacks of illness made it more and more difficult to bring out each successive number at the proper date.

In the number for February appeared the pathetic "Lady's Dream," with an illustration by the author—the reverse of felicitous—representing a "Modern Belinda," with allegorical surroundings of winged skeletons. The number for April contained the "Workhouse Clock," and that for May the "Bridge of Sighs." Meantime Charles Dickens had come to his friend's assistance with a pleasant satire upon the rage for the dwarf, Tom Thumb, who was this year attracting more than his share of favour in the very highest circles. Monckton Milnes and Robert Browning were also sending poems; and the delightful eccentricity of the latter's "Garden Fancies" must have been very perplexing to the sober Magazine Public of 1844. Hood's own contributions of any mark were to become fewer and fewer; and, with the exception of the "Lay of the Labourer" in November 1844, he was to produce no more serious verse. At this juncture, Hood was practically a dying man; and no cause could have been more worthy of his latest thoughts than this of the young labourer, Gifford White, who had been indicted at the Huntingdon Assizes for sending threatening letters to the farmers of his parish. He had written, in the name of his fellow-labourers, asking for employment, and only threatening rick-burning and other terrors in the event of not getting it. The young man, little more than a boy of eighteen, was found guilty and sentenced to transportation for life. Hood's poem was written as a plea for pardon, or at least for a mitigation of the

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sentence. Hood's health was now so gravely impaired, that but for the devotion of his friends, and notably of Mr. F. O. Ward, who constituted himself an unpaid sub-editor, and practically managed the whole business, the publication must have been abandoned. In the June number of the Magazine the public were informed, in an editorial note, of the true state of the case. "A severe attack of the disorder to which he has long been subject—hæmorrhage from the lungs occasioned by enlargement of the heart (itself brought on by the wearing excitement of ceaseless and excessive literary toil)—has in the course of a few weeks reduced Mr. Hood to a state of such extreme debility and exhaustion that during several days fears were entertained for his life." The announcement went on to say that on the evening of 23rd June he had tried "sitting up in bed, to invent and sketch a few comic designs—but even this effort exceeded his strength, and was followed by the wandering delirium of utter nervous exhaustion."

Soon after Christmas, 1843, Hood had made his last change of residence to a house in Finchley New Road—(between the Eyre Arms and Marlborough Road),—to which he gave the name of Devonshire Lodge, after his early and ever-generous friend, the Duke. Hood had apparently taken this step in the full hope and belief that his new venture, the Magazine, was to bring him more prosperous days. But only disappointment and anxiety followed; and under their depressing effects as the new year wore on, it became evident that his working days were numbered. As early as July 1844, there is evidence that his friends were approaching the Prime Minister of the day, Sir Robert Peel, with a view to obtaining for Hood a grant from the civil list. A few months later an intimation was conveyed to him that these efforts had been successful; and he was desired, "as his own life was so precarious," to name a female relative on whom a pension might be conferred. Hood accordingly named his wife. The correspondence between the Prime Minister and Hood, so honourable to both sides, is given in full in the memoir by Hood's daughter. The official notice of a pension to Mrs. Hood of a hundred a year, "to take effect from June last," was received by Hood in November 1844. When Christmas came, Hood had taken to his bed, from which, save for a few hours at a time, he was never to rise. He continued to work at his unfinished story, "Our Family," for the Magazine, propped up in bed; and was able under these sad conditions of pain and weakness to write the playful account of his sitting for his bust, in the previous summer, to the sculptor Mr. Edward Davis. An engraving of this bust was given in a subsequent number of the Magazine, and served as a frontispiece for many years to the serious poems, collected after Hood's death.

In the February number appeared two stanzas, the last effort of the poet, and a worthy confession of that brave and hopeful creed which had enabled him never to faint in the hard struggle, or lose the cheerful faith "that all which we behold is full of blessings."

Farewell, Life! My senses swim,
And the world is growing dim;
Thronging shadows cloud the light,
Like the advent of the night,—
Colder, colder, colder, still,
Upward steals a vapour chill,—
Strong the earthy odour grows—
I smell the Mould above the Rose!

Welcome Life! the Spirit strives!
Strength returns, and hope revives;
Cloudy fears and shapes forlorn
Fly like shadows at the morn,—
O'er the earth there comes a bloom—
Sunny light for sullen gloom,
Warm perfume for vapours cold—
I smell the Rose above the Mould!

The Magazine for March warned the subscribers of the increasing illness of their editor; and the number for April announced, without any reserve, his approaching

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death. The remaining few weeks were weeks of leave-taking, and happily of abundant sympathy and help from friends and neighbours. Hood's faithful and attached friend, F. O. Ward, who had for some months past practically edited the Magazine, wrote to Mr. S. C. Hall an account of one of his last visits to the sick-room:—

"He saw the on-coming of death with great cheerfulness, though without anything approaching to levity; and last night when his friends, Harvey and another, came, he bade them come up, had wine brought, and made us all drink a glass with him, 'that he might know us for friends, and not undertakers!' He conversed for about an hour in his old playful way, with now and then a word or two of deep and tender feeling. When I left he bade me good-bye and kissed me, shedding tears, and saying that perhaps we should never meet again."

On the first of May it became evident to himself and those who watched by him that the end was near. What remains may best be told in his daughter's words. "On the Thursday evening, 1st May, he seemed worse; and knowing himself to be dying, he called us round him—my mother, my little brother, just ten years old, and myself. He gave us his last blessing, tenderly and fondly; and then quietly clasping my mother's hand, he said: 'Remember, Jane, I forgive all,—*all*, as I hope to be forgiven.' He lay for some time calmly and peacefully, but breathing slowly and with difficulty. My mother, bending over him, heard him say faintly: 'O Lord, say, Arise, take up thy cross, and follow Me.' His last words were 'Dying! dying!' as if glad to realise the rest implied in them. He then sank into what seemed a deep slumber. This torpor lasted all Friday; and on Saturday at noon he breathed his last, without a struggle or a sigh."

A few days later, Hood was laid to rest in Kensal Green Cemetery; where, nine years afterwards, was erected, by public subscription, the monument, consisting of a bronze replica of the bust, with two remarkable bas-reliefs, by

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the sculptor Mr. Matthew Noble, representing scenes from the "Bridge of Sighs" and the "Dream of Eugene Aram." Mrs. Hood, worn out by long and devoted attendance on her husband, survived him only eighteen months. The pension was subsequently revived by Lord John Russell in favour of the two children.

As a personality, Hood is not familiar to us as are many of his literary contemporaries. His chronic ill-health unfitted him for society, in which indeed his chronic poverty would have precluded him from taking much part. He was silent in company, seldom opening his mouth in general society save to deliver a jest. "I quite remember his pale face," writes Thackeray, in a well-known *Roundabout Paper*. "He was then thin and deaf and very silent. He scarcely opened his lips during dinner, and he made one pun." Sir James Linton remembers visiting Hood at his chambers in the Adelphi, "when I went to fetch his drawings for his *Comic Annual*—queer pen-and-ink drawings to be cut in facsimile, some by myself. I recall him only as a spare man, of fair stature, grave but not ungenial." "In person," writes Mr. S. C. Hall, "Hood was of middle height, slender and sickly-looking, of sallow complexion and plain features, and very rarely so excited as to give indication of either the pathos or humour that must ever have been working in his soul. His was indeed a countenance rather of melancholy than of mirth; there was something calm, even to solemnity, in the upper portion of the face, seldom relieved, in society, by the eloquent play of the mouth, or the sparkle of an observant eye. In conversation he was by no means brilliant." Hood's Letters, as given us in the *Memorials*, will never take a place in literature with those of Cowper, Lamb, or Edward Fitzgerald. They have little charm of style, or range of intellectual topic. They are mainly domestic, written to, or else concerning, the wife and children he loved so tenderly. Others again are merely facetious, studded with puns, and reflecting chiefly the writer's high animal

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spirits. But they exhibit amply and beyond possibility of question the depth of his household affections, and what Thackeray has truly called his "most pure, modest, and honourable life." Weaknesses he must have had, like other men; but his son and daughter piously and naturally keep them in the background. In managing his worldly fortunes he may have been improvident and unbusinesslike; and he seems never to have recovered from the failure of those commercial ventures which obliged him to seek protection for some years in a foreign land. Certain allusions, not merely playful, in his letters, point to his having been at one period over-fond of the convivial glass; but this could not have been for long; for the early development of organic disease soon made a rigidly careful diet and domestic habits indispensable. For the rest, his industry and contentedness with his lot to the very end; the genuine piety that saved him from ever being soured by distress and disappointment; the freedom from any and every bitterness, save against all forms of oppression of the poor and friendless—make up a story which can hardly be studied without the pity that is "akin to love."

VII

HOOD'S PLACE IN LITERATURE

ALTHOUGH Hood is one of the best known and best loved names in our Literature, it may be doubted if, either as poet or humorist, he has ever received his full due of recognition. For this there are many obvious reasons. In the first place, he wrote too much, and so diluted his reputation. From the date of his marriage, continually harassed by ill health and pecuniary anxieties, he was forced to produce literary matter in season and out of

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season—with the grain, and against it. He was obliged often to manufacture "copy" sitting up in bed, propped with pillows, struggling against pain and weakness. Much of his comic verse might well be spared, and an even larger proportion of his comic prose. And by a well-known perversity incident to human judgment, the critic too often turns to the feebler productions of the writer as the gauge of his quality, and as determining his rank. Hood has suffered in his degree from this cause; even as the reputation of a greater poet, Wordsworth, has suffered, and continues to suffer, from the inferior quality of what Hood happily called his "Betty Foy-bles."

Again, Hood's position in literature has been affected by the circumstance that he did two things excellently, which, in the general view, are incompatible—in which case, as I have already noticed, popular opinion generally fixes on the inferior gift as representing the writer's real capacity. He was a "funny man," as well as a lyric poet of real quality and earnest aims; and was so admirable and original in the former and more abundant character, that it probably caused many to regard the serious verse as merely an ambitious bid for a reputation it was not in the writer's power to achieve. Hood, doubtless, helped to strengthen this impression by practically ceasing to produce serious poetry for some fifteen years of his short life. But that this was due, as I have already said, to the necessity of finding a ready market for his wares, is, I think, beyond a doubt. Thackeray, in his essay before referred to, assumes that Hood mistook the true bent of his genius. Writing to a friend, respecting some memoir of him which had been published, Hood had said, "You will judge how well the author knows me when he says my mind is rather serious than comic." "At the time he wrote these words," says Thackeray, "he evidently undervalued his own serious power, and thought that in punning and broad grinning lay his chief strength." But surely Hood's words here

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are those of saddest irony. It is inconceivable that the man who wrote the poems published in the volume of 1827, and also those of the last two years of his life, when he was once more free to follow the natural bent of his genius, can have doubted that his truest, as well as his highest, faculty was that of the poet.

The best puns of Hood, as has been already observed, have nothing in common with what I have called mechanical wit, but are aglow with humour and imagination. To deny these the rank of wit because the vehicle of them is a "pun," is to be the slave of a definition. A favourite method with Hood, it will be remembered, was to embody his pun in a drawing. These "picture-puns" abound in the *Comic Annuals*. I may cite two specimens of these. One represents an incident in a besieged town, where a live shell has fallen into a house, and is smoking away in alarming fashion in the centre of the floor. The occupants of the room are escaping hurriedly by door, window, and chimney; the legend underneath being, "One black ball excludes." The other drawing referred to, also (like so many of Hood's) of a grim but never cynical humour, displays a recruiting-sergeant waving above his head the dreaded cat-o'-nine-tails. The legend beneath is the well-known toast, "The Army! and Three-times-three!" As I have just said, to disparage the rare and original vein of fancy that prompted such things, merely because they savour of the "pun," is to run the risk of seriously limiting one's range of literary sympathy and enjoyment.

Indeed, the peculiar genius of Hood may oblige us to reconsider more than one of our favourite literary canons; and among them, the relation of wit and poetry. Hood's wit is constantly poetical, and his poetry is so frequently witty, as to make the division of his verse, for editorial purposes, into "serious" and "humorous" a matter of real difficulty. We are all agreed that wit is heightened by an element of poetic fancy. The question remains,—Is Poetry, when in intention serious—helped or

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hindered, strengthened or weakened, by admixture with Wit? The question has often been raised and discussed in connection with the euphuistic poets—"Metaphysical" or Fantastic,—of the seventeenth century, Cowley, Lovelace, Cleveland, and the rest. And the question has been so far settled that we are all agreed that the habitual use of "conceits," wherein is mere ingenuity, is fatal to any enduring pleasure. In this shape, the thing was then a fashion, and faded in due course like all fashions. The bulk of the poetry of these men is unreadable and forgotten. But yet there were true poets among them who now and again made it abundantly clear that Wit and Poetry are two sisters, who may "dwell together in one house." Cowley, who has become, through Johnson's famous memoir, the typical example of the English *concettist*, has proved, if only by his famous comparison of Bacon to the Lawgiver on Mount Pisgah—privileged to behold, but not to enter, the Promised Land,—that what is in essence pure wit is not distinguishable from the very highest Poetry. Richard Lovelace, whose conceits are now and again intolerable from their triviality, has left us at least one lyric where a conceit—in this instance, a paradox—is elevated into the most pathetic beauty by the loftiness of its moral truth:—

> I could not love thee, dear, so much,
> Loved I not Honour more!

Herbert, Crashaw, Donne, in like manner, have their abundant and perishable affectations. Yet all of these in turn show how true wit may subserve the highest aims of the Poet; and that in fact, so far from Wit and Poetry being irreconcilable, they shade and pass into one another by gradations quite imperceptible. Who shall decide, on the moment, whether Waller's couplet—

> The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,
> Lets in new light through chinks which time has made—

is to be pronounced witty or poetical? The truth is that it is both; and that the two are fused, beyond possibility

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of separation, by the intensity and sincerity of the Truth enforced.

This position has been contested by Sydney Smith in two lectures on Wit and Humour delivered at the Royal Institution in 1804. He there boldly affirms that he knew no single passage in any author that was "at once beautiful and witty." Sydney Smith was able to adduce several passages in support of his assertion, where the wit was more prominent than the beauty, and neutralised its effect. He urges, with reason, that the Latin line on the Miracle at Cana—

Nympha pudica Deum vidit, et erubuit—

is witty, but *not* sublime—the sublimity being killed by the wit. But a larger range of investigation would assuredly have modified his judgment. For even his own chosen examples are not all conclusive. He cites, for instance, the familiar couplet from "Lochiel's Warning"—

'Tis the sunset of life gives one mystical lore,
And coming events cast their shadow before—

and avers that this ceases to be witty, just because it is mysterious and morally striking. But it would be at least as fair to argue that the wit, such as it is, enforces and fixes in memory the mystical lesson. A finer and more accomplished critic than Sydney Smith has, however, in our own day, been perplexed by this juxtaposition of wit and pathos in a favourite poem of Hood's. Mr. Francis Palgrave, in the original issue of his *Golden Treasury*, was so far offended by the middle stanzas of "The Death-Bed," as to omit them bodily; and to explain in his notes that they were "ingenious," and that ingenuity and poetry were mutually destructive. As to one of these stanzas:—

Our very hopes belied our fears,
  Our fears our hopes belied—
We thought her dying when she slept,
  And sleeping when she died—

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most of Hood's readers would reply that the poignancy of the pathos is heightened by the so-called "conceit"; and that the use of it is just *not* "ingenious" because it is based upon absolute fidelity to nature. By a happy coincidence, in the same volume Mr. Palgrave has preserved, without any change, a second poem of Hood's, to which the same objection might as well have been taken. In the verses beginning—

> I remember, I remember,
> The house where I was born—

the writer, recalling the poplar trees which surrounded his father's homestead, adds—

> I used to think their slender tops
> Were close against the sky:
> It was a childish ignorance,
> But now 'tis little joy,
> To know I'm farther off from Heaven
> Than when I was a boy.

This is unquestionably witty, but it is also unquestionably beautiful; for in this instance, as in the former, the wit is subordinate to the deeper human interest, and is felt to be so by the reader. It is only fair to Mr. Palgrave to add, that he long ago restored the missing stanzas to the former poem, and has thus left his delightful volume without its solitary flaw.

The blending of poetry and wit is therefore common to Hood with many of his predecessors; but he was the first to make the more daring venture of employing verbal wit—the pun—in serious verse, and justifying it by its results; and this, too, in poems where the interest is purely pathetic. In Hood's mixed poems, such as "Miss Kilmansegg," this form of wit is deliberately employed throughout; and the puns in that poem display an amazing combination of humour and fancy. They display also that quality, in which Hood's puns are unique, of falling naturally into their places, as if they had met the writer on his road, rather than been sought out by him; as if, indeed, it would have been pedantic to avoid them, merely because they happened to be puns. Hood's puns, at their best, never leave on the reader the impression of having been led up to. Even in a serious mood, when his intention is undeniable, he has no fear lest the wit should lower or belittle the truth enforced. Hood's method, in a word, is wholly guiltless of cynicism; and in this respect, as in so many others, he is out of key with the so-called "new humour" of to-day. In "Miss Kilmansegg," the writer has to dwell upon the earliest influences of a child's surroundings upon its character and its future:—

> According to metaphysical creed,
> To the earliest books that children read
> For much good or much bad they are debtors—
> But before with their A B C they start,
> There are things in morals, as well as art,
> That play a very important part—
> "Impressions before the letters."

In this instance the illustration used is sufficiently far-fetched, and yet the evident sincerity of the writer, and the singleness of his purpose, forbid the suspicion that he is a mere trader in double meanings. In one of Hood's earlier poems, the "Ode to Melancholy,"—written before he had become a punster, as it were, by profession,—he illustrates a yet deeper truth by a play upon words which it is hard to believe was not accidental, and came even to the writer himself as a surprise:—

> Even the bright extremes of joy
> Bring on conclusions of disgust,
> Even as the blossoms of the *May*
> Whose fragrance ends in *must*.

The illustration, apart from any remoter intention in the words italicised, is admirable; and, as I have said, the latter—suggesting life's sad transitions from liberty to compulsion—may have been sheer coincidence.

And lastly, an even more thrilling and perhaps inevitable use of the double meaning of a word, is to be found in the stanza from the "Song of the Shirt" already quoted:—

> While underneath the eaves
> The brooding swallows cling,
> As if to show me their sunny backs
> And *twit* me with the spring.

This is probably the most pathetic pun in the language, and is in itself sufficient answer to those who would question the legitimacy of this form of wit in the hands of genius. And that Hood's peculiar faculty justifies the use of the word genius cannot, I think, be gainsaid. As a poet he cannot indeed be placed in the first rank, or even in the second; but genius is no question of place in a class list. Hood has a real individuality, which gives him the primary claim to the title; and he has charm and sincerity to boot. Through these things he lives, and will live, when those manifold echoes of other poets, which abound in every generation, are died away and forgotten. In the fifteen years during which Hood, with slight exception, ceased to produce serious poetry, he had formed a new style of his own through this very abstinence. That constitutional attraction towards the tragedies of life, which showed itself often in his lightest album verse, remained with him to the end; but from and after the "Song of the Shirt," it concentrated itself upon the practical sorrows and grievances of his fellow-men. In the "Lady's Dream," the "Bridge of Sighs," the "Lay of the Labourer," Hood showed how he was realising more and more keenly "what man has made of man." His sympathies were widening as well as deepening; and even on his deathbed he was cherishing new ideas and hopes as to a more perfect charity than he had yet conceived. In that most touching correspondence with Sir Robert Peel, after the announcement of the pension, Hood unfolded these ideas, and confessed himself unsatisfied with the "one-sided humanity" of a group of philanthropists in that day very prominent. "My physical debility," he writes, "finds no tonic virtue in a steel pen, otherwise I would have written one more paper—a forewarning one—against an evil, or the danger of it, arising from a literary movement in which I have had some share; a one-sided humanity, opposite to that Catholic Shakespearian sympathy which felt with king as well as peasant, and duly estimated the mortal temptations of both stations. Certain classes at the poles of society are already too far asunder: it should be the duty of our writers to draw them nearer by kindly attraction; not to aggravate the existing repulsion, and place a wider moral gulf between Rich and Poor, with Hate on the one side and Fear on the other. But I am too weak for this task, the last I had set myself: it is death that stops my pen, you see, and not the pension."

These are worthy to have been the last written words of Thomas Hood. But he had never been a grievous offender against the canons thus laid down; and his name and influence abide with us, with little need of reservation, among the kindliest and most beneficent in the literature of the century.

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TO HOPE

Oh ! take, young Seraph, take thy harp,
And play to me so cheerily ;
For grief is dark, and care is sharp,
And life wears on so wearily.
Oh ! take thy harp !
Oh ! sing as thou wert wont to do,
When, all youth's sunny season long,
I sat and listen'd to thy song,
And yet 'twas ever, ever new,
With magic in its heaven-tuned string—
The future bliss thy constant theme.
Oh ! then each little woe took wing
Away, like phantoms of a dream ;
As if each sound
That flutter'd round,
Had floated over Lethe's stream !

By all those bright and happy hours
We spent in life's sweet eastern bow'rs,
Where thou wouldst sit and smile, and show,
Ere buds were come, where flowers would blow,
And oft anticipate the rise
Of life's warm sun that scaled the skies ;
By many a story of love and glory,
And friendships promised oft to me ;
By all the faith I lent to thee,—
Oh ! take, young Seraph, take thy harp,
And play to me so cheerily ;

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For grief is dark, and care is sharp,
And life wears on so wearily.
Oh! take thy harp!

Perchance the strings will sound less clear,
That long have lain neglected by
In sorrow's misty atmosphere;
It ne'er may speak as it hath spoken
Such joyous notes so brisk and high;
But are its golden chords all broken?
Are there not some, though weak and low,
To play a lullaby to woe?
But thou canst sing of love no more,
For Celia show'd that dream was vain;
And many a fancied bliss is o'er,
That comes not e'en in dreams again.
Alas! alas!
How pleasures pass,
And leave thee now no subject, save
The peace and bliss beyond the grave!

Then be thy flight among the skies:
Take, then, oh! take the skylark's wing,
And leave dull earth, and heavenward rise
O'er all its tearful clouds, and sing
On skylark's wing!

Another life-spring there adorns
Another youth—without the dread
Of cruel care, whose crown of thorns
Is here for manhood's aching head.
Oh! there are realms of welcome day,
A world where tears are wiped away!
Then be thy flight among the skies:
Take, then, oh! take the skylark's wing,
And leave dull earth, and heavenward rise
O'er all its tearful clouds, and sing
On skylark's wing!

THE DEPARTURE OF SUMMER

SUMMER is gone on swallows' wings,
And Earth has buried all her flowers:
No more the lark,—the linnet—sings,
But Silence sits in faded bowers.
There is a shadow on the plain
Of Winter ere he comes again,—
There is in woods a solemn sound
Of hollow warnings whisper'd round,
As Echo in her deep recess
For once had turn'd a prophetess.
Shuddering Autumn stops to list,
And breathes his fear in sudden sighs,
With clouded face, and hazel eyes
That quench themselves, and hide in mist.

Yes, Summer's gone like pageant bright;
Its glorious days of golden light
Are gone—the mimic suns that quiver,
Then melt in Time's dark-flowing river.
Gone the sweetly-scented breeze
That spoke in music to the trees;
Gone—for damp and chilly breath,
As if fresh blown o'er marble seas,
Or newly from the lungs of Death.
Gone its virgin roses' blushes,
Warm as when Aurora rushes
Freshly from the God's embrace,
With all her shame upon her face.
Old Time hath laid them in the mould;
Sure he is blind as well as old,
Whose hand relentless never spares
Young cheeks so beauty-bright as theirs!
Gone are the flame-eyed lovers now
From where so blushing-blest they tarried

Under the hawthorn's blossom-bough,
Gone; for Day and Night are married.
All the light of love is fled:—
Alas! that negro breasts should hide
The lips that were so rosy red,
At morning and at even-tide!

Delightful Summer! then adieu
Till thou shalt visit us anew:
But who without regretful sigh
Can say, adieu, and see thee fly?
Not he that e'er hath felt thy pow'r,
His joy expanding like a flow'r,
That cometh after rain and snow,
Looks up at heaven, and learns to glow:—
Not he that fled from Babel-strife
To the green sabbath-land of life,
To dodge dull Care 'mid cluster'd trees,
And cool his forehead in the breeze,—
Whose spirit, weary-worn perchance,
Shook from its wings a weight of grief,
And perch'd upon an aspen leaf,
For every breath to make it dance.

Farewell!—on wings of sombre stain,
That blacken in the last blue skies,
Thou fly'st; but thou wilt come again
On the gay wings of butterflies.
Spring at thy approach will sprout
Her new Corinthian beauties out,
Leaf-woven homes, where twitter-words
Will grow to songs, and eggs to birds;
Ambitious buds shall swell to flowers,
And April smiles to sunny hours,
Bright days shall be, and gentle nights
Full of soft breath and echo-lights,
As if the god of sun-time kept
His eyes half-open while he slept.

Roses shall be where roses were,
Not shadows, but reality ;
As if they never perish'd there,
But slept in immortality :
Nature shall thrill with new delight,
And Time's relumined river run
Warm as young blood, and dazzling bright,
As if its source were in the sun !

But say, hath Winter then no charms ?
Is there no joy, no gladness warms
His aged heart ? no happy wiles
To cheat the hoary one to smiles ?
Onward he comes—the cruel North
Pours his furious whirlwind forth
Before him—and we breathe the breath
Of famish'd bears that howl to death.
Onward he comes from rocks that blanch
O'er solid streams that never flow :
His tears all ice, his locks all snow,
Just crept from some huge avalanche—
A thing half-breathing and half-warm,
As if one spark began to glow
Within some statue's marble form,
Or pilgrim stiffen'd in the storm.
Oh ! will not Mirth's light arrows fail
To pierce that frozen coat of mail ?
Oh ! will not joy but strive in vain
To light up those glazed eyes again ?

No ! take him in, and blaze the oak,
And pour the wine, and warm the ale ;
His sides shall shake to many a joke,
His tongue shall thaw in many a tale,
His eyes grow bright, his heart be gay,
And even his palsy charm'd away.
What heeds he then the boisterous shout
Of angry winds that scold without,

Like shrewish wives at tavern door?
What heeds he then the wild uproar
Of billows bursting on the shore?
In dashing waves, in howling breeze,
There is a music that can charm him;
When safe, and shelter'd, and at ease,
He hears the storm that cannot harm him.

But hark! those shouts! that sudden din
Of little hearts that laugh within.
Oh! take him where the youngsters play,
And he will grow as young as they!
They come! they come! each blue-eyed Sport,
The Twelfth-Night King and all his court—
'Tis Mirth fresh crown'd with misletoe!
Music with her merry fiddles,
Joy "on light fantastic toe,"
Wit with all his jests and riddles,
Singing and dancing as they go.
And Love, young Love, among the rest,
A welcome—nor unbidden guest.

But still for Summer dost thou grieve?
Then read our Poets—they shall weave
A garden of green fancies still,
Where thy wish may rove at will.
They have kept for after-treats
The essences of summer sweets,
And echoes of its songs that wind
In endless music through the mind:
They have stamp'd in visible traces
The "thoughts that breathe," in words that shine—
The flights of soul in sunny places—
To greet and company with thine.
These shall wing thee on to flow'rs—
The past or future, that shall seem
All the brighter in thy dream
For blowing in such desert hours.

The summer never shines so bright
As thought-of in a winter's night;
And the sweetest loveliest rose
Is in the bud before it blows;
The dear one of the lover's heart
Is painted to his longing eyes,
In charms she ne'er can realise—
But when she turns again to part.
Dream thou then, and bind thy brow
With wreath of fancy roses now,
And drink of Summer in the cup
Where the Muse hath mix'd it up;
The "dance, and song, and sun-burnt mirth,"
With the warm nectar of the earth:
Drink! 'twill glow in every vein,
And thou shalt dream the winter through:
Then waken to the sun again,
And find thy Summer Vision true!

THE SEA OF DEATH

A FRAGMENT

——Methought I saw
Life swiftly treading over endless space;
And, at her foot-print, but a bygone pace,
The ocean-past, which, with increasing wave,
Swallow'd her steps like a pursuing grave.

Sad were my thoughts that anchor'd silently
On the dead waters of that passionless sea,
Unstirr'd by any touch of living breath:
Silence hung over it, and drowsy Death,
Like a gorged sea-bird, slept with folded wings
On crowded carcases—sad passive things

That wore the thin grey surface, like a veil
Over the calmness of their features pale.

And there were spring-faced cherubs that did sleep
Like water-liles on that motionless deep,
How beautiful! with bright unruffled hair
On sleek unfretted brows, and eyes that were
Buried in marble tombs, a pale eclipse!
And smile-bedimpled cheeks, and pleasant lips,
Meekly apart, as if the soul intense
Spake out in dreams of its own innocence:
And so they lay in loveliness, and kept
The birth-night of their peace, that Life e'en wept
With very envy of their happy fronts;
For there were neighbour brows scarr'd by the brunts
Of strife and sorrowing—where Care had set
His crooked autograph, and marr'd the jet
Of glossy locks, with hollow eyes forlorn,
And lips that curl'd in bitterness and scorn—
Wretched,—as they had breathed of this world's pain,
And so bequeathed it to the world again,
Through the beholder's heart in heavy sighs.

So lay they garmented in torpid light,
Under the pall of a transparent night,
Like solemn apparitions lull'd sublime
To everlasting rest,—and with them Time
Slept, as he sleeps upon the silent face
Of a dark dial in a sunless place.

TO AN ABSENTEE

O'ER hill, and dale, and distant sea,
Through all the miles that stretch between,
My thought must fly to rest on thee,
And would, though worlds should intervene.

Nay, thou art now so dear, methinks
The farther we are forced apart,
Affection's firm elastic links
But bind the closer round the heart.

For now we sever each from each,
I learn what I have lost in thee;
Alas, that nothing else could teach
How great indeed my love should be!

Farewell! I did not know thy worth;
But thou art gone, and now 'tis prized:
So angels walk'd unknown on earth,
But when they flew were recognised!

LYCUS THE CENTAUR

FROM AN UNROLLED MANUSCRIPT OF APOLLONIUS CURIUS

THE ARGUMENT

Lycus, detained by Circe in her magical dominion, is beloved by a Water Nymph, who, desiring to render him immortal, has recourse to the Sorceress. Circe gives her an incantation to pronounce, which should turn Lycus into a horse; but the horrible effect of the charm causing her to break off in the midst, he becomes a Centaur.

Who hath ever been lured and bound by a spell
To wander, fore-doomed, in that circle of hell
Where Witchery works with her will like a god,
Works more than the wonders of time at a nod,—
At a word,—at a touch,—at a flash of the eye,
But each form is a cheat, and each sound is a lie,
Things born of a wish—to endure for a thought,
Or last for long ages—to vanish to nought,
Or put on new semblance? O Jove, I had given
The throne of a kingdom to know if that heaven,
And the earth and its streams were of Circe, or whether
They kept the world's birthday and brighten'd together!
For I loved them in terror, and constantly dreaded
That the earth where I trod, and the cave where I bedded,
The face I might dote on, should live out the lease
Of the charm that created, and suddenly cease:
And I gave me to slumber, as if from one dream
To another—each horrid,—and drank of the stream
Like a first taste of blood, lest as water I quaff'd
Swift poison, and never should breathe from the draught,—
Such drink as her own monarch husband drain'd up
When he pledged her, and Fate closed his eyes in the cup.

And I pluck'd of the fruit with held breath, and a fear
That the branch would start back and scream out in my ear;
For once, at my suppering, I pluck'd in the dusk
An apple, juice-gushing and fragrant of musk;
But by daylight my fingers were crimson'd with gore,
And the half-eaten fragment was flesh at the core;
And once—only once—for the love of its blush,
I broke a bloom bough, but there came such a gush
On my hand, that it fainted away in weak fright,
While the leaf-hidden woodpecker shriek'd at the sight;
And oh! such an agony thrill'd in that note,
That my soul, startling up, beat its wings in my throat,
As it long'd to be free of a body whose hand
Was doom'd to work torments a Fury had plann'd!

There I stood without stir, yet how willing to flee,
As if rooted and horror-turn'd into a tree,—
Oh! for innocent death,—and to suddenly win it,
I drank of the stream, but no poison was in it;
I plunged in its waters, but ere I could sink,
Some invisible fate pull'd me back to the brink;
I sprang from the rock, from its pinnacle height,
But fell on the grass with a grasshopper's flight;
I ran at my fears—they were fears and no more,
For the bear would not mangle my limbs, nor the boar,
But moan'd—all their brutalised flesh could not smother
The horrible truth,—we were kin to each other!

They were mournfully gentle, and group'd for relief,
All foes in their skin, but all friends in their grief:
The leopard was there,—baby-mild in its feature;
And the tiger, black-barr'd, with the gaze of a creature
That knew gentle pity; the bristle-back'd boar,
His innocent tusks stain'd with mulberry gore;
And the laughing hyena—but laughing no more;
And the snake, not with magical orbs to devise
Strange death, but with woman's attraction of eyes;
The tall ugly ape, that still bore a dim shine

Through his hairy eclipse of a manhood divine;
And the elephant stately, with more than its reason,
How thoughtful in sadness! but this is no season
To reckon them up from the lag-bellied toad
To the mammoth, whose sobs shook his ponderous load.
There were woes of all shapes, wretched forms, when I came,
That hung down their heads with a human-like shame;
The elephant hid in the boughs, and the bear
Shed over his eyes the dark veil of his hair;
And the womanly soul turning sick with disgust,
Tried to vomit herself from her serpentine crust;
While all groan'd their groans into one at their lot,
As I brought them the image of what they were not.

Then rose a wild sound of the human voice choking
Through vile brutal organs—low tremulous croaking;
Cries swallow'd abruptly—deep animal tones
Attuned to strange passion, and full-utter'd groans;
All shuddering weaker, till hush'd in a pause
Of tongues in mute motion and wide-yawning jaws;
And I guess'd that those horrors were meant to tell o'er
The tale of their woes; but the silence told more,
That writhed on their tongues; and I knelt on the sod,
And pray'd with my voice to the cloud-stirring god,
For the sad congregation of supplicants there,
That upturn'd to his heaven brute faces of prayer;
And I ceased, and they utter'd a moaning so deep,
That I wept for my heart-ease,—but they could not weep,
And gazed with red eyeballs, all wistfully dry,
At the comfort of tears in a stag's human eye.
Then I motion'd them round, and, to soothe their distress,
I caress'd, and they bent them to meet my caress,
Their necks to my arm, and their heads to my palm,
And with poor grateful eyes suffer'd meekly and calm
Those tokens of kindness, withheld by hard fate
From returns that might chill the warm pity to hate;
So they passively bow'd—save the serpent, that leapt
To my breast like a sister, and pressingly crept

In embrace of my neck, and with close kisses blister'd
My lips in rash love,—then drew backward, and glister'd
Her eyes in my face, and loud hissing affright,
Dropt down, but swift started away from my sight!

This sorrow was theirs, but thrice wretched my lot,
Turn'd brute in my soul, though my body was not,
When I fled from the sorrow of womanly faces,
That shrouded their woe in the shade of lone places,
And dash'd off bright tears, till their fingers were wet,
And then wiped their lids with long tresses of jet:
But I fled—though they stretch'd out their hands, all entangled
With hair, and blood-stain'd of the breasts they had mangled,—
Though they call'd—and perchance but to ask, had I seen
Their loves, or to tell the vile wrongs that had been:
But I stay'd not to hear, lest the story should hold
Some hell-form of words, some enchantment, once told,
Might translate me in flesh to a brute; and I dreaded
To gaze on their charms, lest my faith should be wedded
With some pity,—and love in that pity perchance—
To a thing not all lovely; for once at a glance,
Methought, where one sat, I descried a bright wonder
That flow'd like a long silver rivulet under
The long fenny grass,—with so lovely a breast,
Could it be a snake-tail made the charm of the rest?

So I roam'd in that circle of horrors, and Fear
Walk'd with me, by hills, and in valleys, and near
Cluster'd trees for their gloom—not to shelter from heat—
But lest a brute-shadow should grow at my feet;
And besides that full oft in the sunshiny place
Dark shadows would gather like clouds on its face,
In the horrible likeness of demons (that none
Could see, like invisible flames in the sun);
But grew to one monster that seized on the light,

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Like the dragon that strangles the moon in the night;
Fierce sphinxes, long serpents, and asps of the south;
Wild birds of huge beak, and all horrors that drouth
Engenders of slime in the land of the pest,
Vile shapes without shape, and foul bats of the West,
Bringing Night on their wings; and the bodies wherein
Great Brahma imprisons the spirits of sin,
Many-handed, that blent in one phantom of fight
Like a Titan, and threatfully warr'd with the light;
I have heard the wild shriek that gave signal to close,
When they rushed on that shadowy Python of foes,
That met with sharp beaks and wide gaping of jaws,
With flappings of wings, and fierce grasping of claws,
And whirls of long tails:—I have seen the quick flutter
Of fragments dissever'd,—and necks stretch'd to utter
Long screamings of pain,—the swift motion of blows,
And wrestling of arms—to the flight at the close,
When the dust of the earth startled upward in rings,
And flew on the whirlwind that follow'd their wings.

Thus they fled—not forgotten—but often to grow
Like fears in my eyes, when I walk'd to and fro
In the shadows, and felt from some beings unseen
The warm touch of kisses, but clean or unclean
I knew not, nor whether the love I had won
Was of heaven or hell—till one day in the sun,
In its very noon-blaze, I could fancy a thing
Of beauty, but faint as the cloud-mirrors fling
On the gaze of the shepherd that watches the sky,
Half-seen and half-dream'd in the soul of his eye.
And when in my musings I gazed on the stream,
In motionless trances of thought, there would seem
A face like that face, looking upward through mine;
With its eyes full of love, and the dim-drownëd shine
Of limbs and fair garments, like clouds in that blue
Serene:—there I stood for long hours but to view
Those fond earnest eyes that were ever uplifted
Towards me, and wink'd as the water-weed drifted

Between; but the fish knew that presence, and plied
Their long curvy tails, and swift darted aside.

There I gazed for lost time, and forgot all the things
That once had been wonders—the fishes with wings,
And the glimmer of magnified eyes that look'd up
From the glooms of the bottom like pearls in a cup,
And the huge endless serpent of silvery gleam,
Slow winding along like a tide in the stream.
Some maid of the waters, some Naiad, methought
Held me dear in the pearl of her eye—and I brought
My wish to that fancy; and often I dash'd
My limbs in the water, and suddenly splash'd
The cool drops around me, yet clung to the brink,
Chill'd by watery fears, how that beauty might sink
With my life in her arms to her garden, and bind me
With its long tangled grasses, or cruelly wind me
In some eddy to hum out my life in her ear,
Like a spider-caught bee,—and in aid of that fear
Came the tardy remembrance—Oh falsest of men!
Why was not that beauty remember'd till then?
My love, my safe love, whose glad life would have run
Into mine—like a drop—that our fate might be one,
That now, even now,—may-be,—clasp'd in a dream,
That form which I gave to some jilt of the stream,
And gazed with fond eyes that her tears tried to smother
On a mock of those eyes that I gave to another!

Then I rose from the stream, but the eyes of my mind,
Still full of the tempter, kept gazing behind
On her crystalline face, while I painfully leapt
To the bank, and shook off the curst waters, and wept
With my brow in the reeds; and the reeds to my ear
Bow'd, bent by no wind, and in whispers of fear,
Growing small with large secrets, foretold me of one
That loved me,—but oh to fly from her, and shun
Her love like a pest—though her love was as true
To mine as her stream to the heavenly blue;

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For why should I love her with love that would bring
All misfortune, like hate, on so joyous a thing?
Because of her rival,—even Her whose witch-face
I had slighted, and therefore was doom'd in that place
To roam, and had roam'd, where all horrors grew rank,
Nine days ere I wept with my brow on that bank;
Her name be not named, but her spite would not fail
To our love like a blight; and they told me the tale
Of Scylla,—and Picus, imprison'd to speak
His shrill-screaming woe through a woodpecker's beak.

Then they ceased—I had heard as the voice of my star
That told me the truth of my fortunes—thus far
I had read of my sorrow, and lay in the hush
Of deep meditation,—when lo! a light crush
Of the reeds, and I turn'd and look'd round in the night
Of new sunshine, and saw, as I sipp'd of the light
Narrow-winking, the realised nymph of the stream,
Rising up from the wave with the bend and the gleam
Of a fountain, and o'er her white arms she kept throwing
Bright torrents of hair, that went flowing and flowing
In falls to her feet, and the blue waters roll'd
Down her limbs like a garment, in many a fold,
Sun-spangled, gold-broider'd, and fled far behind,
Like an infinite train. So she came and reclined
In the reeds, and I hunger'd to see her unseal
The buds of her eyes that would ope and reveal
The blue that was in them;—they oped and she raised
Two orbs of pure crystal, and timidly gazed
With her eyes on my eyes; but their colour and shine
Was of that which they look'd on, and mostly of mine—
For she loved me,—except when she blush'd, and they sank,
Shame-humbled, to number the stones on the bank,
Or her play-idle fingers, while lisping she told me
How she put on her veil, and in love to behold me
Would wing through the sun till she fainted away
Like a mist, and then flew to her waters and lay

In love-patience long hours, and sore dazzled her eyes
In watching for mine 'gainst the midsummer skies.
But now they were heal'd,—O my heart, it still dances
When I think of the charm of her changeable glances,
And my image how small when it sank in the deep
Of her eyes where her soul was,—Alas! now they weep,
And none knoweth where. In what stream do her eyes
Shed invisible tears? Who beholds where her sighs
Flow in eddies, or sees the ascent of the leaf
She has pluck'd with her tresses? Who listens her grief
Like a far fall of waters, or hears where her feet
Grow emphatic among the loose pebbles, and beat
Them together? Ah! surely her flowers float adown
To the sea unaccepted, and little ones drown
For need of her mercy,—even he whose twin-brother
Will miss him for ever; and the sorrowful mother
Imploreth in vain for his body to kiss
And cling to, all dripping and cold as it is,
Because that soft pity is lost in hard pain!
We loved,—how we loved!—for I thought not again
Of the woes that were whisper'd like fears in that place
If I gave me to beauty. Her face was the face
Far away, and her eyes were the eyes that were drown'd
For my absence,—her arms were the arms that sought round
And claspt me to nought; for I gazed and became
Only true to my falsehood, and had but one name
For two loves, and call'd ever on Ægle, sweet maid
Of the sky-loving waters,—and was not afraid
Of the sight of her skin;—for it never could be,
Her beauty and love were misfortunes to me!

Thus our bliss had endured for a time-shorten'd space,
Like a day made of three, and the smile of her face
Had been with me for joy,—when she told me indeed
Her love was self-task'd with a work that would need
Some short hours, for in truth 'twas the veriest pity
Our love should not last, and then sang me a ditty,

Of one with warm lips that should love her, and love her
When suns were burnt dim and long ages past over.
So she fled with her voice, and I patiently nested
My limbs in the reeds, in still quiet, and rested
Till my thoughts grew extinct, and I sank in a sleep
Of dreams,—but their meaning was hidden too deep
To be read what their woe was ;—but still it was woe
That was writ on all faces that swam to and fro
In that river of night ;—and the gaze of their eyes
Was sad,—and the bend of their brows,—and their cries
Were seen, but I heard not. The warm touch of tears
Travell'd down my cold cheeks, and I shook till my fears
Awaked me, and lo ! I was couch'd in a bower,
The growth of long summers rear'd up in an hour !
Then I said, in the fear of my dream, I will fly
From this magic, but could not, because that my eye
Grew love-idle among the rich blooms ; and the earth
Held me down with its coolness of touch, and the mirth
Of some bird was above me,—who, even in fear,
Would startle the thrush? and methought there drew near
A form as of Ægle,—but it was not the face
Hope made, and I knew the witch-Queen of that place,
Even Circe the Cruel, that came like a Death,
Which I fear'd, and yet fled not, for want of my breath.
There was thought in her face, and her eyes were not raised
From the grass at her foot, but I saw, as I gazed,
Her spite—and her countenance changed with her mind
As she plann'd how to thrall me with beauty, and bind
My soul to her charms,—and her long tresses play'd
From shade into shine and from shine into shade,
Like a day in mid-autumn,—first fair, O how fair !
With long snaky locks of the adder-black hair
That clung round her neck,—those dark locks that I prize,
For the sake of a maid that once loved me with eyes
Of that fathomless hue,—but they changed as they roll'd,
And brighten'd, and suddenly blazed into gold
That she comb'd into flames, and the locks that fell down

Turn'd dark as they fell, but I slighted their brown,
Nor loved, till I saw the light ringlets shed wild,
That innocence wears when she is but a child;
And her eyes,—Oh I ne'er had been witched with their shine,
Had they been any other, my Ægle, than thine!

Then I gave me to magic, and gazed till I madden'd
In the full of their light,—but I sadden'd and sadden'd
The deeper I look'd,—till I sank on the snow
Of her bosom, a thing made of terror and woe,
And answer'd its throb with the shudder of fears,
And hid my cold eyes from her eyes with my tears,
And strain'd her white arms with the still languid weight
Of a fainting distress. There she sat like the Fate
That is nurse unto Death, and bent over in shame
To hide me from her—the true Ægle—that came
With the words on her lips the false witch had fore-given
To make me immortal—for now I was even
At the portals of Death, who but waited the hush
Of world-sounds in my ear to cry welcome, and rush
With my soul to the banks of his black-flowing river.
Oh, would it had flown from my body for ever,
Ere I listen'd those words, when I felt with a start,
The life-blood rush back in one throb to my heart,
And saw the pale lips where the rest of that spell
Had perish'd in horror—and heard the farewell
Of that voice that was drown'd in the dash of the stream!
How fain had I follow'd, and plunged with that scream
Into death, but my being indignantly lagg'd
Through the brutalised flesh that I painfully dragg'd
Behind me:—"O Circe! O mother of spite!
Speak the last of that curse! and imprison me quite
In the husk of a brute,—that no pity may name
The man that I was,—that no kindred may claim
The monster I am! Let me utterly be
Brute-buried, and Nature's dishonour with me
Uninscribed!"—But she listen'd my prayer, that was
praise

To her malice, with smiles, and advised me to gaze
On the river for love,—and perchance she would make
In pity a maid without eyes for my sake,
And she left me like Scorn. Then I ask'd of the wave,
What monster I was, and it trembled and gave
The true shape of my grief, and I turn'd with my face
From all waters for ever, and fled through that place,
Till with horror more strong than all magic I pass'd
Its bounds, and the world was before me at last.

There I wander'd in sorrow, and shunn'd the abodes
Of men, that stood up in the likeness of Gods,
But I saw from afar the warm shine of the sun
On their cities, where man was a million, not one;
And I saw the white smoke of their altars ascending,
That show'd where the hearts of the many were blending,
And the wind in my face brought shrill voices that came
From the trumpets that gather'd whole bands in one fame
As a chorus of man,—and they stream'd from the gates
Like a dusky libation pour'd out to the Fates.
But at times there were gentler processions of peace
That I watch'd with my soul in my eyes till their cease,
There were women! there men! but to me a third sex
I saw them all dots—yet I loved them as specks:
And oft to assuage a sad yearning of eyes
I stole near the city, but stole covert-wise
Like a wild beast of love, and perchance to be smitten
By some hand that I rather had wept on than bitten!
Oh, I once had a haunt near a cot where a mother
Daily sat in the shade with her child, and would smother
Its eyelids in kisses, and then in its sleep
Sang dreams in its ear of its manhood, while deep
In a thicket of willows I gazed o'er the brooks
That murmur'd between us and kiss'd them with looks;
But the willows unbosom'd their secret, and never
I return'd to a spot I had startled for ever,
Though I oft long'd to know, but could ask it of none,
Was the mother still fair, and how big was her son?

For the haunters of fields they all shunn'd me by flight,
The men in their horror, the women in fright;
None ever remain'd save a child once that sported
Among the wild bluebells, and playfully courted
The breeze; and beside him a speckled snake lay
Tight strangled, because it had hiss'd him away
From the flower at his finger; he rose and drew near
Like a Son of Immortals, one born to no fear,
But with strength of black locks and with eyes azure bright
To grow to large manhood of merciful might.
He came, with his face of bold wonder, to feel,
The hair of my side, and to lift up my heel,
And question'd my face with wide eyes; but when under
My lids he saw tears,—for I wept at his wonder,
He stroked me, and utter'd such kindliness then,
That the once love of women, the friendship of men
In past sorrow, no kindness e'er came like a kiss
On my heart in its desolate day such as this!
And I yearn'd at his cheeks in my love, and down bent,
And lifted him up in my arms with intent
To kiss him,—but he cruel-kindly, alas!
Held out to my lips a pluck'd handful of grass!
Then I dropt him in horror, but felt as I fled
The stone he indignantly hurl'd at my head,
That dissever'd my ear,—but I felt not, whose fate
Was to meet more distress in his love than his hate!

Thus I wander'd, companion'd of grief and forlorn
Till I wish'd for that land where my being was born,
But what was that land with its love, where my home
Was self-shut against me; for why should I come
Like an after-distress to my grey-bearded father,
With a blight to the last of his sight?—let him rather
Lament for me dead, and shed tears in the urn
Where I was not, and still in fond memory turn
To his son even such as he left him. Oh, how
Could I walk with the youth once my fellows, but now

Like Gods to my humbled estate ?—or how bear
The steeds once the pride of my eyes and the care
Of my hands ? Then I turn'd me self-banish'd, and came
Into Thessaly here, where I met with the same
As myself. I have heard how they met by a stream
In games, and were suddenly changed by a scream
That made wretches of many, as she roll'd her wild eyes
Against heaven, and so vanish'd.—The gentle and wise
Lose their thoughts in deep studies, and others their ill
In the mirth of mankind where they mingle them still.

THE TWO PEACOCKS OF BEDFONT

I

Alas ! That breathing Vanity should go
Where Pride is buried,—like its very ghost,
Uprisen from the naked bones below,
In novel flesh, clad in the silent boast
Of gaudy silk that flutters to and fro,
Shedding its chilling superstition most
On young and ignorant natures—as it wont
To haunt the peaceful churchyard of Bedfont !

II

Each Sabbath morning, at the hour of prayer,
Behold two maidens, up the quiet green
Shining, far distant, in the summer air
That flaunts their dewy robes and breatnes between
Their downy plumes,—sailing as if they were
Two far-off ships,—until they brush between
The churchyard's humble walls, and watch and wait
On either side of the wide open'd gate.

III

And there they stand—with haughty necks before
  God's holy house, that points towards the skies—
Frowning reluctant duty from the poor,
  And tempting homage from unthoughtful eyes:
And Youth looks lingering from the temple door,
  Breathing its wishes in unfruitful sighs,
With pouting lips,—forgetful of the grace,
Of health, and smiles, on the heart-conscious face;—

IV

Because that Wealth, which has no bliss beside,
  May wear the happiness of rich attire;
And those two sisters, in their silly pride,
  May change the soul's warm glances for the fire
Of lifeless diamonds;—and for health denied,—
  With art, that blushes at itself, inspire
Their languid cheeks—and flourish in a glory
That has no life in life, nor after-story.

V

The aged priest goes shaking his grey hair
  In meekest censuring, and turns his eye
Earthward in grief, and heavenward in pray'r,
  And sighs, and clasps his hands, and passes by,
Good-hearted man! what sullen soul would wear
  Thy sorrow for a garb, and constantly
Put on thy censure, that might win the praise
Of one so grey in goodness and in days?

VI

Also the solemn clerk partakes the shame
  Of this ungodly shine of human pride,
And sadly blends his reverence and blame
  In one grave bow, and passes with a stride
Impatient:—many a red-hooded dame
  Turns her pain'd head, but not her glance, aside
From wanton dress, and marvels o'er again,
That heaven hath no wet judgments for the vain.

VII

"I have a lily in the bloom at home,"
  Quoth one, "and by the blessed Sabbath day
I'll pluck my lily in its pride, and come
  And read a lesson upon vain array;—
And when stiff silks are rustling up, and some
  Give place, I'll shake it in proud eyes and say—
Making my reverence,—'Ladies, an you please,
King Solomon's not half so fine as these.'"

VIII

Then her meek partner, who has nearly run
  His earthly course,—"Nay, Goody, let your text
Grow in the garden.—We have only one—
  Who knows that these dim eyes may see the next?
Summer will come again, and summer sun,
  And lilies too,—but I were sorely vext
To mar my garden, and cut short the blow
Of the last lily I may live to grow."

IX

"The last!" quoth she, "and though the last it were—
  Lo! those two wantons, where they stand so proud
With waving plumes, and jewels in their hair,
  And painted cheeks, like Dagons to be bow'd
And curtsey'd to!—last Sabbath after pray'r,
  I heard the little Tomkins ask aloud
If they were angels—but I made him know
God's bright ones better, with a bitter blow!"

X

So speaking, they pursue the pebbly walk
  That leads to the white porch the Sunday throng,
Hand-coupled urchins in restrainëd talk,
  And anxious pedagogue that chastens wrong,
And posied churchwarden with solemn stalk,
  And gold-bedizen'd beadle flames along,
And gentle peasant clad in buff and green,
Like a meek cowslip in the spring serene;

XI

And blushing maiden—modestly array'd
  In spotless white,—still conscious of the glass;
And she, the lonely widow, that hath made
  A sable covenant with grief,—alas!
She veils her tears under the deep, deep shade,
  While the poor kindly-hearted, as they pass,
Bend to unclouded childhood, and caress
Her boy,—so rosy!—and so fatherless!

XII

Thus, as good Christians ought, they all draw near
  The fair white temple, to the timely call
Of pleasant bells that tremble in the ear.—
  Now the last frock, and scarlet hood, and shawl
Fade into dusk, in the dim atmosphere
  Of the low porch, and heav'n has won them all,
—Saving those two, that turn aside and pass,
In velvet blossom, where all flesh is grass.

XIII

Ah me! to see their silken manors trail'd
  In purple luxuries—with restless gold,—
Flaunting the grass where widowhood has wail'd
  In blotted black,—over the heapy mould
Panting wave-wantonly! They never quail'd
  How the warm vanity abused the cold;
Nor saw the solemn faces of the gone
Sadly uplooking through transparent stone:

XIV

But swept their dwellings with unquiet light,
  Shocking the awful presence of the dead;
Where gracious natures would their eyes benight,
  Nor wear their being with a lip too red,
Nor move too rudely in the summer bright
  Of sun, but put staid sorrow in their tread,
Meting it into steps, with inward breath,
In very pity to bereaved death.

XV

Now in the church, time-sober'd minds resign
  To solemn pray'r, and the loud chaunted hymn,—
With glowing picturings of joys divine
  Painting the mist-light where the roof is dim;
But youth looks upward to the window shine,
  Warming with rose and purple and the swim
Of gold, as if thought-tinted by the stains
Of gorgeous light through many-colour'd panes;

XVI

Soiling the virgin snow wherein God hath
  Enrobed his angels,—and with absent eyes
Hearing of Heav'n, and its directed path,
  Thoughtful of slippers,—and the glorious skies
Clouding with satin,—till the preacher's wrath
  Consumes his pity, and he glows and cries
With a deep voice that trembles in its might,
And earnest eyes grown eloquent in light:

XVII

"Oh, that the vacant eye would learn to look
  On very beauty, and the heart embrace
True loveliness, and from this holy book
  Drink the warm-breathing tenderness and grace
Of love indeed! Oh, that the young soul took
  Its virgin passion from the glorious face
Of fair religion, and address'd its strife,
To win the riches of eternal life!

XVIII

"Doth the vain heart love glory that is none,
  And the poor excellence of vain attire?
Oh go, and drown your eyes against the sun,
  The visible ruler of the starry quire,
Till boiling gold in giddy eddies run,
  Dazzling the brain with orbs of living fire;
And the faint soul down-darkens into night,
And dies a burning martyrdom to light.

XIX

"Oh go, and gaze,—when the low winds of ev'n
Breathe hymns, and Nature's many forests nod
Their gold-crown'd heads; and the rich blooms of heav'n
Sun-ripen'd give their blushes up to God;
And mountain-rocks and cloudy steeps are riv'n
By founts of fire, as smitten by the rod
Of heavenly Moses,—that your thirsty sense
May quench its longings of magnificence!

XX

"Yet suns shall perish—stars shall fade away—
Day into darkness—darkness into death—
Death into silence; the warm light of day,
The blooms of summer, the rich glowing breath
Of even—all shall wither and decay,
Like the frail furniture of dreams beneath
The touch of morn—or bubbles of rich dyes
That break and vanish in the aching eyes."

XXI

They hear, soul-blushing, and repentant shed
Unwholesome thoughts in wholesome tears, and pour
Their sin to earth,—and with low drooping head
Receive the solemn blessing, and implore
Its grace—then soberly with chasten'd tread,
They meekly press towards the gusty door
With humbled eyes that go to graze upon
The lowly grass—like him of Babylon.

XXII

The lowly grass!—O water-constant mind!
Fast-ebbing holiness!—soon-fading grace
Of serious thought, as if the gushing wind
Through the low porch had wash'd it from the face
For ever!—How they lift their eyes to find
Old vanities!—Pride wins the very place
Of meekness, like a bird, and flutters now
With idle wings on the curl-conscious brow!

XXIII

And lo! with eager looks they seek the way
   Of old temptation at the lowly gate;
To feast on feathers, and on vain array,
   And painted cheeks, and the rich glistering state
Of jewel-sprinkled locks.—But where are they,
   The graceless haughty ones that used to wait
With lofty neck, and nods, and stiffen'd eye?—
None challenge the old homage bending by.

XXIV

In vain they look for the ungracious bloom
   Of rich apparel where it glow'd before,—
For Vanity has faded all to gloom,
   And lofty Pride has stiffen'd to the core,
For impious Life to tremble at its doom,—
   Set for a warning token evermore,
Whereon, as now, the giddy and the wise
Shall gaze with lifted hands and wond'ring eyes.

XXV

The aged priest goes on each Sabbath morn,
   But shakes not sorrow under his grey hair;
The solemn clerk goes lavender'd and shorn
   Nor stoops his back to the ungodly pair;—
And ancient lips that pucker'd up in scorn,
   Go smoothly breathing to the house of pray'r;
And in the garden-plot, from day to day,
The lily blooms its long white life away.

XXVI

And where two haughty maidens used to be,
   In pride of plume, where plumy Death had trod,
Trailing their gorgeous velvets wantonly,
   Most unmeet pall, over the holy sod;—
There, gentle stranger, thou may'st only see
   Two sombre Peacocks.——Age, with sapient nod
Marking the spot, still tarries to declare
How they once lived, and wherefore they are there.

HYMN TO THE SUN

Giver of glowing light!
Though but a god of other days,
The kings and sages
Of wiser ages
Still live and gladden in thy genial rays!

King of the tuneful lyre,
Still poets' hymns to thee belong;
Though lips are cold
Whereon of old
Thy beams all turn'd to worshipping and song!

Lord of the dreadful bow,
None triumph now for Python's death;
But thou dost save
From hungry grave
The life that hangs upon a summer breath.

Father of rosy day,
No more thy clouds of incense rise;
But waking flow'rs
At morning hours,
Give out their sweets to meet thee in the skies.

God of the Delphic fane,
No more thou listenest to hymns sublime;
But they will leave
On winds at eve,
A solemn echo to the end of time.

MIDNIGHT

UNFATHOMABLE Night! how dost thou sweep
Over the flooded earth, and darkly hide
The mighty city under thy full tide;
Making a silent palace for old Sleep,
Like his own temple under the hush'd deep,
Where all the busy day he doth abide,
And forth at the late dark, outspreadeth wide
His dusky wings, whence the cold waters sweep!
How peacefully the living millions lie!
Lull'd unto death beneath his poppy spells;
There is no breath—no living stir—no cry—
No tread of foot—no song—no music-call—
Only the sound of melancholy bells—
The voice of Time—survivor of them all!

TO A SLEEPING CHILD

I

OH, 'tis a touching thing, to make one weep,—
A tender infant with its curtain'd eye,
Breathing as it would neither live nor die
With that unchanging countenance of sleep!
As if its silent dream, serene and deep,
Had lined its slumber with a still blue sky
So that the passive cheeks unconscious lie
With no more life than roses—just to keep
The blushes warm, and the mild, odorous breath.
O blossom boy! so calm is thy repose,
So sweet a compromise of life and death,
'Tis pity those fair buds should e'er unclose
For memory to stain their inward leaf,
Tinging thy dreams with unacquainted grief.

TO A SLEEPING CHILD

II

THINE eyelids slept so beauteously, I deem'd
No eyes could wake so beautiful as they :
Thy rosy cheeks in such still slumbers lay,
I loved their peacefulness, nor ever dream'd
Of dimples :—for those parted lips so seem'd,
I never thought a smile could sweetlier play,
Nor that so graceful life could chase away
Thy graceful death,—till those blue eyes upbeam'd.
Now slumber lies in dimpled eddies drown'd,
And roses bloom more rosily for joy,
And odorous silence ripens into sound,
And fingers move to sound.—All-beauteous boy !
How thou dost waken into smiles, and prove,
If not more lovely thou art more like Love !

TO FANCY

MOST delicate Ariel ! submissive thing,
Won by the mind's high magic to its hest —
Invisible embassy, or secret guest,—
Weighing the light air on a lighter wing ;—
Whether into the midnight moon, to bring
Illuminate visions to the eye of rest,—
Or rich romances from the florid West,—
Or to the sea, for mystic whispering,—
Still by thy charm'd allegiance to the will,
The fruitful wishes prosper in the brain,
As by the fingering of fairy skill,—
Moonlight, and waters, and soft music's strain,
Odours, and blooms, and *my* Miranda's smile,
Making this dull world an enchanted isle.

FAIR INES

O SAW ye not fair Ines?
She's gone into the West,
To dazzle when the sun is down,
And rob the world of rest:
She took our daylight with her,
The smiles that we love best,
With morning blushes on her cheek,
And pearls upon her breast.

O turn again, fair Ines,
Before the fall of night,
For fear the moon should shine alone,
And stars unrivall'd bright;
And blessed will the lover be
That walks beneath their light,
And breathes the love against thy cheek
I dare not even write!

Would I had been, fair Ines,
That gallant cavalier,
Who rode so gaily by thy side,
And whisper'd thee so near!
Were there no bonny dames at home,
Or no true lovers here,
That he should cross the seas to win
The dearest of the dear?

I saw thee, lovely Ines,
Descend along the shore,
With bands of noble gentlemen,
And banners waved before;
And gentle youth and maidens gay,
And snowy plumes they wore;
It would have been a beauteous dream,
—If it had been no more!

Alas, alas, fair Ines,
She went away with song,
With Music waiting on her steps,
And shoutings of the throng ;
But some were sad, and felt no mirth,
But only Music's wrong,
In sounds that sang Farewell, Farewell,
To her you've loved so long.

Farewell, farewell, fair Ines,
That vessel never bore
So fair a lady on its deck,
Nor danced so light before,—
Alas, for pleasure on the sea,
And sorrow on the shore !
The smile that blest one lover's heart
Has broken many more !

TO A FALSE FRIEND

Our hands have met, but not our hearts ;
Our hands will never meet again.
Friends, if we have ever been,
Friends we cannot now remain :
I only know I loved you once,
I only know I loved in vain ;
Our hands have met, but not our hearts ;
Our hands will never meet again !

Then farewell to heart and hand !
I would our hands had never met :
Even the outward form of love
Must be resign'd with some regret.
Friends, we still might seem to be,
If I my wrong could e'er forget ;
Our hands have join'd but not our hearts :
I would our hands had never met !

Vith

ODE

AUTUMN

I SAW old Autumn in the misty morn
Stand shadowless like Silence, listening
To silence, for no lonely bird would sing
Into his hollow ear from woods forlorn,
Nor lowly hedge nor solitary thorn;
Shaking his languid locks all dewy bright
With tangled gossamer that fell by night,
Pearling his coronet of golden corn.

Where are the songs of Summer?—With the sun,
Oping the dusky eyelids of the south,
Till shade and silence waken up as one,
And Morning sings with a warm odorous mouth.
Where are the merry birds?—Away, away,
On panting wings through the inclement skies,
Lest owls should prey
Undazzled at noon-day,
And tear with horny beak their lustrous eyes.

Where are the blooms of Summer?—In the west,
Blushing their last to the last sunny hours,
When the mild Eve by sudden Night is prest
Like tearful Proserpine, snatch'd from her flow'rs
To a most gloomy breast.
Where is the pride of Summer,—the green prime,—
The many, many leaves all twinkling?—Three
On the moss'd elm; three on the naked lime
Trembling,—and one upon the old oak tree!
Where is the Dryad's immortality?—
Gone into mournful cypress and dark yew,
Or wearing the long gloomy Winter through
In the smooth holly's green eternity.

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The squirrel gloats on his accomplish'd hoard,
The ants have brimm'd their garners with ripe grain,
And honey bees have stored
The sweets of summer in their luscious cells;
The swallows all have wing'd across the main;
But here the Autumn melancholy dwells,
And sighs her tearful spells
Amongst the sunless shadows of the plain.
Alone, alone,
Upon a mossy stone,
She sits and reckons up the dead and gone,
With the last leaves for a love-rosary;
Whilst all the wither'd world looks drearily,
Like a dim picture of the drownëd past
In the hush'd mind's mysterious far-away,
Doubtful what ghostly thing will steal the last
Into that distance, grey upon the grey.

O go and sit with her, and be o'ershaded
Under the languid downfall of her hair;
She wears a coronal of flowers faded
Upon her forehead, and a face of care;—
There is enough of wither'd everywhere
To make her bower,—and enough of gloom;
There is enough of sadness to invite,
If only for the rose that died, whose doom
Is Beauty's,—she that with the living bloom
Of conscious cheeks most beautifies the light:
There is enough of sorrowing, and quite
Enough of bitter fruits the earth doth bear,—
Enough of chilly droppings from her bowl;
Enough of fear and shadowy despair,
To frame her cloudy prison for the soul!

SONNET

SILENCE

THERE is a silence where hath been no sound,
There is a silence where no sound may be,
In the cold grave—under the deep deep sea,
Or in wide desert where no life is found,
Which hath been mute, and still must sleep profound;
No voice is hush'd—no life treads silently,
But clouds and cloudy shadows wander free,
That never spoke, over the idle ground:
But in green ruins, in the desolate walls
Of antique palaces, where Man hath been,
Though the dun fox, or wild hyæna, calls,
And owls, that flit continually between,
Shriek to the echo, and the low winds moan,——
There the true Silence is, self-conscious and alone.

SONNET

WRITTEN IN KEATS' "ENDYMION."

I SAW pale Dian, sitting by the brink
Of silver falls, the overflow of fountains
From cloudy steeps; and I grew sad to think
Endymion's foot was silent on those mountains
And he but a hush'd name, that Silence keeps
In dear remembrance,—lonely, and forlorn,
Singing it to herself until she weeps
Tears, that perchance still glisten in the morn:—
And as I mused, in dull imaginings,
There came a flash of garments, and I knew
The awful Muse by her harmonious wings
Charming the air to music as she flew—
Anon there rose an echo through the vale
Gave back Endymion in a dreamlike tale.

SONNET

TO AN ENTHUSIAST

YOUNG ardent soul, graced with fair Nature's truth,
Spring warmth of heart, and fervency of mind,
And still a large late love of all thy kind,
Spite of the world's cold practice and Time's tooth,—
For all these gifts, I know not, in fair sooth,
Whether to give thee joy, or bid thee blind
Thine eyes with tears,—that thou hast not resign'd
The passionate fire and freshness of thy youth:
For as the current of thy life shall flow,
Gilded by shine of sun or shadow-stain'd,
Through flow'ry valley or unwholesome fen,
Thrice blessed in thy joy, or in thy woe
Thrice cursed of thy race,—thou art ordain'd
To share beyond the lot of common men.

TO A COLD BEAUTY

LADY, wouldst thou heiress be
  To Winter's cold and cruel part?
When he sets the rivers free,
  Thou dost still lock up thy heart;—
Thou that shouldst outlast the snow,
But in the whiteness of thy brow?

Scorn and cold neglect are made
  For winter gloom and winter wind,
But thou wilt wrong the summer air,
  Breathing it to words unkind,—
Breath which only should belong
To love, to sunlight, and to song!

When the little buds unclose,
   Red, and white, and pied, and blue,
And that virgin flow'r, the rose,
   Opes her heart to hold the dew,
Wilt thou lock thy bosom up
With no jewel in its cup?

Let not cold December sit
   Thus in Love's peculiar throne:
Brooklets are not prison'd now,
   But crystal frosts are all agone,
And that which hangs upon the spray,
It is no snow, but flow'r of May!

SONNET

DEATH

It is not death, that sometime in a sigh
This eloquent breath shall take its speechless flight;
That sometime these bright stars, that now reply
In sunlight to the sun, shall set in night;
That this warm conscious flesh shall perish quite,
And all life's ruddy springs forget to flow;
That thoughts shall cease, and the immortal sprite
Be lapp'd in alien clay and laid below;
It is not death to know this,—but to know
That pious thoughts, which visit at new graves
In tender pilgrimage, will cease to go
So duly and so oft,—and when grass waves
Over the past-away, there may be then
No resurrection in the minds of men.

SERENADE

Ah, sweet, thou little knowest how
  I wake and passionate watches keep;
And yet while I address thee now,
  Methinks thou smilest in thy sleep.
'Tis sweet enough to make me weep,
  That tender thought of love and thee,
That while the world is hush'd so deep,
  Thy soul's perhaps awake to me!

Sleep on, sleep on, sweet bride of sleep!
  With golden visions for thy dower,
While I this midnight vigil keep,
  And bless thee in thy silent bower;
To me 'tis sweeter than the power
  Of sleep, and fairy dreams unfurl'd,
That I alone, at this still hour,
  In patient love outwatch the world.

VERSES IN AN ALBUM

Far above the hollow
Tempest, and its moan,
Singeth bright Apollo
In his golden zone,—
Cloud doth never shade him,
Nor a storm invade him,
On his joyous throne.

So when I behold me
In an orb as bright,
How thy soul doth fold me
In its throne of light!
Sorrow never paineth,
Nor a care attaineth
To that blessed height.

THE FORSAKEN

THE dead are in their silent graves,
And the dew is cold above,
And the living weep and sigh,
Over dust that once was love.

Once I only wept the dead,
But now the living cause my pain:
How couldst thou steal me from my tears,
To leave me to my tears again?

My Mother rests beneath the sod,—
Her rest is calm and very deep:
I wish'd that she could see our loves,—
But now I gladden in her sleep.

Last night unbound my raven locks,
The morning saw them turn'd to grey,
Once they were black and well beloved,
But thou art changed,—and so are they!

The useless lock I gave thee once,
To gaze upon and think of me,
Was ta'en with smiles,—but this was torn
In sorrow that I send to thee!

SONG

The stars are with the voyager
Wherever he may sail;
The moon is constant to her time;
The sun will never fail;
But follow, follow round the world,
The green earth and the sea,
So love is with the lover's heart,
Wherever he may be.

Wherever he may be, the stars
Must daily lose their light;
The moon will veil her in the shade;
The sun will set at night.
The sun may set, but constant love
Will shine when he's away;
So that dull night is never night,
And day is brighter day.

SONG

O LADY, leave thy silken thread
   And flowery tapestrie:
There's living roses on the bush,
   And blossoms on the tree;
Stoop where thou wilt, thy careless hand
   Some random bud will meet;
Thou canst not tread, but thou wilt find
   The daisy at thy feet.

'Tis like the birthday of the world,
   When earth was born in bloom;
The light is made of many dyes,
   The air is all perfume;
There's crimson buds, and white and blue—
   The very rainbow showers
Have turn'd to blossoms where they fell,
   And sown the earth with flowers.

There's fairy tulips in the east,
   The garden of the sun;
The very streams reflect the hues,
   And blossom as they run:
While Morn opes like a crimson rose,
   Still wet with pearly showers;
Then, lady, leave the silken thread
   Thou twinest into flowers!

BIRTHDAY VERSES

Good morrow to the golden morning,
  Good morrow to the world's delight—
I've come to bless thy life's beginning,
  Since it makes my own so bright!

I have brought no roses, sweetest,
  I could find no flowers, dear,—
It was when all sweets were over
  Thou wert born to bless the year.

But I've brought thee jewels, dearest,
  In thy bonny locks to shine,—
And if love shows in their glances,
  They have learn'd that look of mine!

I LOVE THEE

I LOVE thee—I love thee!
'Tis all that I can say;—
It is my vision in the night,
My dreaming in the day;
The very echo of my heart,
The blessing when I pray:
I love thee—I love thee!
Is all that I can say.

I love thee—I love thee!
Is ever on my tongue;
In all my proudest poesy
That chorus still is sung;
It is the verdict of my eyes,
Amidst the gay and young:
I love thee—I love thee!
A thousand maids among.

I love thee—I love thee!
Thy bright and hazel glance,
The mellow lute upon those lips,
Whose tender tones entrance;
But most, dear heart of hearts, thy proofs
That still these words enhance,
I love thee—I love thee!
Whatever be thy chance.

LINES

Let us make a leap, my dear,
In our love, of many a year,
And date it very far away,
On a bright clear summer day,
When the heart was like a sun
To itself, and falsehood none;
And the rosy lips a part
Of the very loving heart,
And the shining of the eye
But a sign to know it by;—
When my faults were all forgiven,
And my life deserved of Heaven.
Dearest, let us reckon so,
And love for all that long ago;
Each absence count a year complete,
And keep a birthday when we meet.

FALSE POETS AND TRUE

TO WORDSWORTH

Look how the lark soars upward and is gone,
Turning a spirit as he nears the sky!
His voice is heard, but body there is none
To fix the vague excursions of the eye.
So, poets' songs are with us, tho' they die
Obscured, and hid by death's oblivious shroud,
And Earth inherits the rich melody
Like raining music from the morning cloud.
Yet, few there be who pipe so sweet and loud
Their voices reach us through the lapse of space:
The noisy day is deafen'd by a crowd
Of undistinguish'd birds, a twittering race;
But only lark and nightingale forlorn
Fill up the silences of night and morn.

THE TWO SWANS

A FAIRY TALE

I

IMMORTAL Imogen, crown'd queen above
The lilies of thy sex, vouchsafe to hear
A fairy dream in honour of true love—
True above ills, and frailty, and all fear—
Perchance a shadow of his own career
Whose youth was darkly prison'd and long-twined
By serpent-sorrow, till white Love drew near,
And sweetly sang him free, and round his mind
A bright horizon threw, wherein no grief may wind.

II

I saw a tower builded on a lake,
Mock'd by its inverse shadow, dark and deep—
That seem'd a still intenser night to make,
Wherein the quiet waters sank to sleep,—
And, whatso'er was prison'd in that keep,
A monstrous Snake was warden :—round and round
In sable ringlets I beheld him creep
Blackest amid black shadows to the ground,
Whilst his enormous head the topmost turret crown'd.

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ng sings,

III

From whence he shot fierce light against the stars,
Making the pale moon paler with affright;
And with his ruby eye out-threaten'd Mars—
That blazed in the mid-heavens, hot and bright—
Nor slept, nor wink'd, but with a steadfast spite
Watch'd their wan looks and tremblings in the skies;
And that he might not slumber in the night,
The curtain-lids were pluck'd from his large eyes,
So he might never drowse, but watch his secret prize.

IV

Prince or princess in dismal durance pent,
Victims of old Enchantment's love or hate,
Their lives must all in painful sighs be spent,
Watching the lonely waters soon and late,
And clouds that pass and leave them to their fate,
Or company their grief with heavy tears:—
Meanwhile that Hope can spy no golden gate
For sweet escapement, but in darksome fears
They weep and pine away as if immortal years.

V

No gentle bird with gold upon its wing
Will perch upon the grate—the gentle bird
Is safe in leafy dell, and will not bring
Freedom's sweet key-note and commission-word
Learn'd of a fairy's lips, for pity stirr'd—
Lest while he trembling sings, untimely guest!
Watch'd by that cruel Snake and darkly heard,
He leave a widow on her lonely nest,
To press in silent grief the darlings of her breast.

VI

No gallant knight, adventurous, in his bark,
Will seek the fruitful perils of the place,
To rouse with dipping oar the waters dark
That bear that serpent image on their face.
And Love, brave Love! though he attempt the base,
Nerved to his loyal death, he may not win
His captive lady from the strict embrace
Of that foul Serpent, clasping her within
His sable folds—like Eve enthrall'd by the old Sin.

VII

But there is none—no knight in panoply,
Nor Love, intrench'd in his strong steely coat:
No little speck—no sail—no helper nigh,
No sign—no whispering—no plash of boat:—
The distant shores show dimly and remote,
Made of a deeper mist,—serene and grey,—
And slow and mute the cloudy shadows float
Over the gloomy wave, and pass away,
Chased by the silver beams that on their marges play.

VIII

And bright and silvery the willows sleep
Over the shady verge—no mad winds tease
Their hoary heads; but quietly they weep
Their sprinkling leaves—half fountains and half trees:
There lilies be—and fairer than all these,
A solitary Swan her breast of snow
Launches against the wave that seems to freeze
Into a chaste reflection, still below
Twin-shadow of herself wherever she may go.

IX

And forth she paddles in the very noon
Of solemn midnight like an elfin thing,
Charm'd into being by the argent moon—
Whose silver light for love of her fair wing
Goes with her in the shade, still worshipping
Her dainty plumage :—all around her grew
A radiant circlet, like a fairy ring ;
And all behind, a tiny little clue
Of light, to guide her back across the waters blue.

X

And sure she is no meaner than a fay,
Redeem'd from sleepy death, for beauty's sake,
By old ordainment :—silent as she lay,
Touch'd by a moonlight wand I saw her wake,
And cut her leafy slough, and so forsake
The verdant prison of her lily peers,
That slept amidst the stars upon the lake—
A breathing shape—restored to human fears,
And new-born love and grief—self-conscious of her tears.

XI

And now she clasps her wings around her heart,
And near that lonely isle begins to glide,
Pale as her fears, and oft-times with a start
Turns her impatient head from side to side
In universal terrors—all too wide
To watch ; and often to that marble keep
Upturns her pearly eyes, as if she spied
Some foe, and crouches in the shadows steep
That in the gloomy wave go diving fathoms deep.

XII

And well she may, to spy that fearful thing
All down the dusky walls in circlets wound;
Alas! for what rare prize, with many a ring
Girding the marble casket round and round?
His folded tail, lost in the gloom profound,
Terribly darkeneth the rocky base;
But on the top his monstrous head is crown'd
With prickly spears, and on his doubtful face
Gleam his unwearied eyes, red watchers of the place.

XIII

Alas! of the hot fires that nightly fall,
No one will scorch him in those orbs of spite,
So he may never see beneath the wall
That timid little creature, all too bright,
That stretches her fair neck, slender and white,
Invoking the pale moon, and vainly tries
Her throbbing throat, as if to charm the night
With song—but, hush—it perishes in sighs,
And there will be no dirge sad-swelling, though she dies!

XIV

She droops—she sinks—she leans upon the lake,
Fainting again into a lifeless flower;
But soon the chilly springs anoint and wake
Her spirit from its death, and with new power
She sheds her stifled sorrows in a shower
Of tender song, timed to her falling tears—
That wins the shady summit of that tower,
And, trembling all the sweeter for its fears,
Fills with imploring moan that cruel monster's ears.

XV

And, lo! the scaly beast is all deprest,
Subdued like Argus by the might of sound—
What time Apollo his sweet lute addrest
To magic converse with the air, and bound
The many monster eyes, all slumber-drown'd:—
So on the turret-top that watchful Snake
Pillows his giant head, and lists profound,
As if his wrathful spite would never wake,
Charm'd into sudden sleep for Love and Beauty's sake!

XVI

His prickly crest lies prone upon his crown,
And thirsty lip from lip disparted flies,
To drink that dainty flood of music down—
His scaly throat is big with pent-up sighs—
And whilst his hollow ear trancëd lies,
His looks for envy of the charmed sense
Are fain to listen, till his steadfast eyes,
Stung into pain by their own impotence,
Distil enormous tears into the lake immense.

XVII

Oh, tuneful Swan! oh, melancholy bird!
Sweet was that midnight miracle of song,
Rich with ripe sorrow, needful of no word
To tell of pain, and love, and love's deep wrong—
Hinting a piteous tale—perchance how long
Thy unknown tears were mingled with the lake,
What time disguised thy leafy mates among—
And no eye knew what human love and ache
Dwelt in those dewy leaves, and heart so nigh to break.

XVIII

Therefore no poet will ungently touch
The water-lily, on whose eyelids dew
Trembles like tears; but ever hold it such
As human pain may wander through and through,
Turning the pale leaf paler in its hue—
Wherein life dwells, transfigured, not entomb'd,
By magic spells. Alas! who ever knew
Sorrow in all its shapes, leafy and plumed,
Or in gross husks of brutes eternally inhumed?

XIX

And now the winged song has scaled the height
Of that dark dwelling, builded for despair,
And soon a little casement flashing bright
Widens self-open'd into the cool air—
That music like a bird may enter there
And soothe the captive in his stony cage;
For there is nought of grief, or painful care,
But plaintive song may happily engage
From sense of its own ill, and tenderly assuage.

XX

And forth into the light, small and remote,
A creature, like the fair son of a king,
Draws to the lattice in his jewell'd coat
Against the silver moonlight glistening,
And leans upon his white hand listening
To that sweet music that with tenderer tone
Salutes him, wondering what kindly thing
Is come to soothe him with so tuneful moan,
Singing beneath the walls as if for him alone!

XXI

And while he listens, the mysterious song,
Woven with timid particles of speech,
Twines into passionate words that grieve along
The melancholy notes, and softly teach
The secrets of true love,—that trembling reach
His earnest ear, and through the shadows dun
He missions like replies, and each to each
Their silver voices mingle into one,
Like blended streams that make one music as they run.

XXII

"Ah! Love, my hope is swooning in my heart,—"
"Ay, sweet, my cage is strong and hung full high—"
"Alas! our lips are held so far apart,
Thy words come faint,—they have so far to fly!—"
"If I may only shun that serpent-eye,—"
"Ah me! that serpent-eye doth never sleep;—"
"Then, nearer thee, Love's martyr, I will die!—"
"Alas, alas! that word has made me weep!
For pity's sake remain safe in thy marble keep!"

XXIII

"My marble keep! it is my marble tomb—"
"Nay, sweet! but thou hast there thy living breath—"
"Aye to expend in sighs for this hard doom;—"
"But I will come to thee and sing beneath,
And nightly so beguile this serpent wreath;—"
"Nay, I will find a path from these despairs."
"Ah, needs then thou must tread the back of death,
Making his stony ribs thy stony stairs.—
Behold his ruby eye, how fearfully it glares!"

XXIV

Full sudden at these words, the princely youth
Leaps on the scaly back that slumbers, still
Unconscious of his foot, yet not for ruth,
But numb'd to dulness by the fairy skill
Of that sweet music (all more wild and shrill
For intense fear) that charm'd him as he lay—
Meanwhile the lover nerves his desperate will,
Held some short throbs by natural dismay,
Then down the serpent-track begins his darksome way.

XXV

Now dimly seen—now toiling out of sight,
Eclipsed and cover'd by the envious wall;
Now fair and spangled in the sudden light,
And clinging with wide arms for fear of fall;
Now dark and shelter'd by a kindly pall
Of dusky shadow from his wakeful foe;
Slowly he winds adown—dimly and small,
Watch'd by the gentle Swan that sings below,
Her hope increasing, still, the larger he doth grow.

XXVI

But nine times nine the serpent folds embrace
The marble walls about—which he must tread
Before his anxious foot may touch the base:
Long is the dreary path, and must be sped!
But Love, that holds the mastery of dread,
Braces his spirit, and with constant toil
He wins his way, and now, with arms outspread,
Impatient plunges from the last long coil:
So may all gentle Love ungentle Malice foil!

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XXVII

The song is hush'd, the charm is all complete,
And two fair Swans are swimming on the lake :
But scarce their tender bills have time to meet,
When fiercely drops adown that cruel Snake—
His steely scales a fearful rustling make,
Like autumn leaves that tremble and foretell
The sable storm ;—the plumy lovers quake—
And feel the troubled waters pant and swell,
Heaved by the giant bulk of their pursuer fell.

XXVIII

His jaws, wide yawning like the gates of Death,
Hiss horrible pursuit—his red eyes glare
The waters into blood—his eager breath
Grows hot upon their plumes :—now, minstrel fair !
She drops her ring into the waves, and there
It widens all around, a fairy ring
Wrought of the silver light—the fearful pair
Swim in the very midst, and pant and cling
The closer for their fears, and tremble wing to wing.

XXIX

Bending their course over the pale grey lake,
Against the pallid East, wherein light play'd
In tender flushes, still the baffled Snake
Circled them round continually, and bay'd
Hoarsely and loud, forbidden to invade
The sanctuary ring—his sable mail
Roll'd darkly through the flood, and writhed and made
A shining track over the waters pale,
Lash'd into boiling foam by his enormous tail.

XXX

And so they sail'd into the distance dim,
Into the very distance—small and white,
Like snowy blossoms of the spring that swim
Over the brooklets—follow'd by the spite
Of that huge Serpent, that with wild affright
Worried them on their course, and sore annoy,
Till on the grassy marge I saw them 'light,
And change, anon, a gentle girl and boy,
Lock'd in embrace of sweet unutterable joy !

XXXI

Then came the Morn, and with her pearly showers
Wept on them, like a mother, in whose eyes
Tears are no grief ; and from his rosy bowers
The Oriental sun began to rise,
Chasing the darksome shadows from the skies ;
Wherewith that sable Serpent far away
Fled, like a part of night—delicious sighs
From waking blossoms purified the day,
And little birds were singing sweetly from each spray.

ODE ON A DISTANT PROSPECT OF CLAPHAM ACADEMY [1]

I

Ah me! those old familiar bounds!
That classic house, those classic grounds
My pensive thought recalls!
What tender urchins now confine,
What little captives now repine,
Within yon irksome walls?

II

Ay, that's the very house! I know
Its ugly windows, ten a-row!
Its chimneys in the rear!
And there's the iron rod so high,
That drew the thunder from the sky
And turn'd our table-beer!

III

There I was birch'd! there I was bred!
There like a little Adam fed
From Learning's woeful tree!
The weary tasks I used to con!—
The hopeless leaves I wept upon!—
Most fruitless leaves to me!—

IV

The summon'd class!—the awful bow!—
I wonder who is master now
And wholesome anguish sheds!
How many ushers now employs,
How many maids to see the boys
Have nothing in their heads!

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[1] No connexion with any other Ode.

V

And Mrs. S * * *?—Doth she abet
(Like Pallas in the parlour) yet
Some favour'd two or three,—
The little Crichtons of the hour,
Her muffin-medals that devour,
And swill her prize—bohea?

VI

Ay, there's the playground! there's the lime,
Beneath whose shade in summer's prime
So wildly I have read!—
Who sits there *now*, and skims the cream
Of young Romance, and weaves a dream
Of Love and Cottage-bread?

VII

Who struts the Randall of the walk?
Who models tiny heads in chalk?
Who scoops the light canoe?
What early genius buds apace?
Where's Poynter? Harris? Bowers? Chase?
Hal Baylis? blithe Carew?

VIII

Alack! they're gone—a thousand ways!
And some are serving in "the Greys,"
And some have perish'd young!—
Jack Harris weds his second wife;
Hal Baylis drives the *wane* of life;
And blithe Carew—is hung!

IX

Grave Bowers teaches A B C
To savages at Owhyee;
Poor Chase is with the worms!—
All, all are gone—the olden breed!—
New crops of mushroom boys succeed,
"And push us from our *forms!*"

X

Lo! where they scramble forth, and shout,
And leap, and skip, and mob about,
At play where we have play'd!
Some hop, some run, (some fall,) some twine
Their crony arms; some in the shine,—
And some are in the shade!

XI

Lo there what mix'd conditions run!
The orphan lad; the widow's son;
And Fortune's favour'd care—
The wealthy-born, for whom she hath
Mac-Adamised the future path—
The Nabob's pamper'd heir!

XII

Some brightly starr'd—some evil born,—
For honour some, and some for scorn,—
For fair or foul renown!
Good, bad, indiff'rent—none may lack!
Look, here's a White, and there's a Black!
And there's a Creole brown!

XIII

Some laugh and sing, some mope and weep,
And wish *their* frugal sires would keep
  Their only sons at home;—
Some tease the future tense, and plan
The full-grown doings of the man,
  And pant for years to come!

XIV

A foolish wish! There's one at hoop;
And four at *fives!* and five who stoop
  The marble taw to speed!
And one that curvets in and out,
Reining his fellow Cob about,—
  Would I were in his *steed!*

XV

Yet he would gladly halt and drop
That boyish harness off, to swop
  With this world's heavy van—
To toil, to tug. O little fool!
While thou canst be a horse at school,
  To wish to be a man!

XVI

Perchance thou deem'st it were a thing
To wear a crown,—to be a king!
  And sleep on regal down!
Alas! thou know'st not kingly cares;
Far happier is thy head that wears
  That hat without a crown!

XVII

And dost thou think that years acquire
New added joys? Dost think thy sire
More happy than his son?
That manhood's mirth?—Oh, go thy ways
To Drury-lane when —— *plays*,
And see how *forced* our fun!

XVIII

Thy taws are brave!—thy tops are rare!—
Our tops are spun with coils of care,
Our *dumps* are no delight!—
The Elgin marbles are but tame,
And 'tis at best a sorry game
To fly the Muse's kite!

XIX

Our hearts are dough, our heels are lead,
Our topmost joys fall dull and dead
Like balls with no rebound!
And often with a faded eye
We look behind, and send a sigh
Towards that merry ground!

XX

Then be contented. Thou hast got
The most of heaven in thy young lot;
There's sky-blue in thy cup!
Thou'lt find thy Manhood all too fast—
Soon come, soon gone! and Age at last
A sorry *breaking-up!*

SONG

THERE is dew for the flow'ret
And honey for the bee,
And bowers for the wild bird,
And love for you and me.

There are tears for the many
And pleasures for the few;
But let the world pass on, dear,
There's love for me and you.

There is care that will not leave us,
And pain that will not flee;
But on our hearth unalter'd
Sits Love—'tween you and me.

Our love it ne'er was reckon'd,
Yet good it is and true,
It's *half* the world to me, dear,
It's *all* the world to you.

THE WATER LADY

ALAS, the moon should ever beam
To show what man should never see !—
I saw a maiden on a stream,
And fair was she !

I staid awhile, to see her throw
Her tresses back, that all beset
The fair horizon of her brow
With clouds of jet.

I staid a little while to view
Her cheek, that wore in place of red
The bloom of water, tender blue,
Daintily spread.

I staid to watch, a little space,
Her parted lips if she would sing ;
The waters closed above her face
With many a ring.

And still I staid a little more,
Alas ! she never comes again !
I throw my flowers from the shore,
And watch in vain.

I know my life will fade away,
I know that I must vainly pine,
For I am made of mortal clay,
But she's divine !

AUTUMN

THE Autumn is old,
The sere leaves are flying ;—
He hath gather'd up gold,
And now he is dying ;—
Old Age, begin sighing !

The vintage is ripe,
The harvest is heaping ;—
But some that have sow'd
Have no riches for reaping ;—
Poor wretch, fall a-weeping !

The year's in the wane,
There is nothing adorning,
The night has no eve,
And the day has no morning ;—
Cold winter gives warning.

The rivers run chill,
The red sun is sinking,
And I am grown old,
And life is fast shrinking ;—
Here's enow for sad thinking !

I REMEMBER, I REMEMBER

I REMEMBER, I remember,
The house where I was born,
The little window where the sun
Came peeping in at morn;
He never came a wink too soon,
Nor brought too long a day,
But now, I often wish the night
Had borne my breath away!

I remember, I remember,
The roses, red and white,
The violets, and the lily-cups,
Those flowers made of light!
The lilacs where the robin built,
And where my brother set
The laburnum on his birthday,—
The tree is living yet!

I remember, I remember,
Where I was used to swing,
And thought the air must rush as fresh
To swallows on the wing;
My spirit flew in feathers then,
That is so heavy now,
And summer pools could hardly cool
The fever on my brow!

I remember, I remember,
The fir trees dark and high;
I used to think their slender tops
Were close against the sky:
It was a childish ignorance,
But now 'tis little joy
To know I'm farther off from Heav'n
Than when I was a boy.

THE POET'S PORTION

WHAT is a mine—a treasury—a dower—
A magic talisman of mighty power?

A poet's wide possession of the earth.
He has th' enjoyment of a flower's birth
Before its budding—ere the first red streaks,—
And Winter cannot rob him of their cheeks.

Look—if his dawn be not as other men's!
Twenty bright flushes—ere another kens
The first of sunlight is abroad—he sees
Its golden 'lection of the topmost trees,
And opes the splendid fissures of the morn.

When do his fruits delay, when doth his corn
Linger for harvesting? Before the leaf
Is commonly abroad, in his piled sheaf
The flagging poppies lose their ancient flame.
No sweet there is, no pleasure I can name,
But he will sip it first—before the lees.
'Tis his to taste rich honey,—ere the bees
Are busy with the brooms. He may forestall
June's rosy advent for his coronal;
Before th' expectant buds upon the bough,
Twining his thoughts to bloom upon his brow.

Oh! blest to see the flower in its seed,
Before its leafy presence; for indeed
Leaves are but wings on which the summer flies,
And each thing perishable fades and dies,
Escap'd in thought; but his rich thinkings be
Like overflows of immortality:
So that what there is steep'd shall perish never,
But live and bloom, and be a joy for ever.

ODE TO THE MOON

I

Mother of light! how fairly dost thou go
Over those hoary crests, divinely led!—
Art thou that huntress of the silver bow,
Fabled of old? Or rather dost thou tread
Those cloudy summits thence to gaze below,
Like the wild Chamois from her Alpine snow,
Where hunter never climb'd,—secure from dread?
How many antique fancies have I read
Of that mild presence! and how many wrought!
Wondrous and bright,
Upon the silver light,
Chasing fair figures with the artist, Thought!

II

What art thou like?—Sometimes I see thee ride
A far-bound galley on its perilous way,
Whilst breezy waves toss up their silvery spray;—
Sometimes behold thee glide,
Cluster'd by all thy family of stars,
Like a lone widow, through the welkin wide,
Whose pallid cheek the midnight sorrow mars;—
Sometimes I watch thee on from steep to steep,
Timidly lighted by thy vestal torch,
Till in some Latmian cave I see thee creep,
To catch the young Endymion asleep,—
Leaving thy splendour at the jagged porch!—

III

Oh, thou art beautiful, howe'er it be!
Huntress, or Dian, or whatever named;
And he, the veriest Pagan, that first framed
A silver idol, and ne'er worshipp'd thee!—
It is too late—or thou should'st have my knee—

Too late now for the old Ephesian vows,
And not divine the crescent on thy brows!—
Yet, call thee nothing but the mere mild Moon,
Behind those chestnut boughs,
Casting their dappled shadows at my feet;
I will be grateful for that simple boon,
In many a thoughtful verse and anthem sweet,
And bless thy dainty face whene'er we meet.

IV

In nights far gone,—ay, far away and dead,—
Before Care-fretted, with a lidless eye,—
I was thy wooer on my little bed,
Letting the early hours of rest go by,
To see thee flood the heaven with milky light,
And feed thy snow-white swans, before I slept;
For thou wert then purveyor of my dreams,—
Thou wert the fairies' armourer, that kept
Their burnish'd helms, and crowns, and corslets bright,
Their spears, and glittering mails;
And ever thou didst spill in winding streams
Sparkles and midnight gleams,
For fishes to new gloss their argent scales!—

V

Why sighs?—why creeping tears?—why claspëd hands?—
Is it to count the boy's expended dow'r?
That fairies since have broke their gifted wands?
That young Delight, like any o'erblown flow'r,
Gave, one by one, its sweet leaves to the ground?—
Why then, fair Moon, for all thou mark'st no hour,
Thou art a sadder dial to old Time
Than ever I have found
On sunny garden-plot, or moss-grown tow'r,
Motto'd with stern and melancholy rhyme.

VI

Why should I grieve for this?—Oh I must yearn
Whilst Time, conspirator with Memory,
Keeps his cold ashes in an ancient urn,
Richly emboss'd with childhood's revelry,
With leaves and cluster'd fruits, and flow'rs eterne,—
(Eternal to the world, though not to me),
Aye there will those brave sports and blossoms be,
The deathless wreath, and undecay'd festoon,
When I am hearsed within,—
Less than the pallid primrose to the Moon,
That now she watches through a vapour thin.

VII

So let it be:—Before I lived to sigh,
Thou wert in Avon, and a thousand rills,
Beautiful Orb! and so, whene'er I lie
Trodden, thou wilt be gazing from thy hills.
Blest be thy loving light, where'er it spills,
And blessëd thy fair face, O Mother mild!
Still shine, the soul of rivers as they run,
Still lend thy lonely lamp to lovers fond,
And blend their plighted shadows into one:—
Still smile at even on the bedded child,
And close his eyelids with thy silver wand!

SONNET

WRITTEN IN A VOLUME OF SHAKSPEARE

How bravely Autumn paints upon the sky
The gorgeous fame of Summer which is fled!
Hues of all flow'rs, that in their ashes lie,
Trophied in that fair light whereon they fed,—
Tulip, and hyacinth, and sweet rose red,—
Like exhalations from the leafy mould,
Look here how honour glorifies the dead,
And warms their scutcheons with a glance of gold!—
Such is the memory of poets old,
Who on Parnassus' hill have bloom'd elate;
Now they are laid under their marbles cold,
And turn'd to clay, whereof they were create;
But god Apollo hath them all enroll'd,
And blazon'd on the very clouds of Fate!

A RETROSPECTIVE REVIEW

I

Oh, when I was a tiny boy,
My days and nights were full of joy,
My mates were blithe and kind !—
No wonder that I sometimes sigh,
And dash the tear-drop from my eye,
To cast a look behind !

II

A hoop was an eternal round
Of pleasure. In those days I found
A top a joyous thing ;—
But now those past delights I drop,
My head, alas ! is all my top,
And careful thoughts the string !

III

My marbles—once my bag was stored,—
Now I must play with Elgin's lord,
With Theseus for a taw !
My playful horse has slipt his string,
Forgotten all his capering,
And harness'd to the law !

IV

My kite—how fast and far it flew !
Whilst I, a sort of Franklin, drew
My pleasure from the sky !
'Twas paper'd o'er with studious themes,
The tasks I wrote—my present dreams
Will never soar so high !

V

My joys are wingless all and dead;
My dumps are made of more than lead;
  My flights soon find a fall;
My fears prevail, my fancies droop,
Joy never cometh with a hoop,
  And seldom with a call!

VI

My football's laid upon the shelf;
I am a shuttlecock myself
  The world knocks to and fro;—
My archery is all unlearn'd,
And grief against myself has turn'd
  My arrows and my bow!

VII

No more in noontide sun I bask;
My authorship's an endless task,
  My head's ne'er out of school:
My heart is pain'd with scorn and slight,
I have too many foes to fight,
  And friends grown strangely cool!

VIII

The very chum that shared my cake
Holds out so cold a hand to shake,
  It makes me shrink and sigh:—
On this I will not dwell and hang,—
The changeling would not feel a pang
  Though these should meet his eye!

IX

No skies so blue or so serene
As then;—no leaves look half so green
   As clothed the playground tree!
All things I loved are alter'd so,
Nor does it ease my heart to know
   That change resides in me!

X

Oh for the garb that mark'd the boy,
The trousers made of corduroy,
   Well ink'd with black and red;
The crownless hat, ne'er deem'd an ill—
It only let the sunshine still
   Repose upon my head!

XI

Oh for the riband round the neck!
The careless dogs'-ears apt to deck
   My book and collar both!
How can this formal man be styled
Merely an Alexandrine child,
   A boy of larger growth?

XII

Oh for that small, small beer anew!
And (heaven's own type) that mild sky-blue
   That wash'd my sweet meals down;
The master even!—and that small Turk
That fagg'd me!—worse is now my work—
   A fag for all the town!

XIII

Oh for the lessons learn'd by heart!
Ay, though the very birch's smart
  Should mark those hours again;
I'd "kiss the rod," and be resign'd
Beneath the stroke, and even find
  Some sugar in the cane!

XIV

The Arabian Nights rehearsed in bed!
The Fairy Tales in school-time read,
  By stealth, 'twixt verb and noun!
The angel form that always walk'd
In all my dreams, and look'd and talk'd
  Exactly like Miss Brown!

XV

The *omne bene*—Christmas come!
The prize of merit, won for home—
  Merit had prizes then!
But now I write for days and days,
For fame—a deal of empty praise,
  Without the silver pen!

XVI

Then "home, sweet home!" the crowded coach—
The joyous shout—the loud approach—
  The winding horns like rams'!
The meeting sweet that made me thrill,
The sweetmeats, almost sweeter still,
  No 'satis' to the 'jams'!—

XVII

When that I was a tiny boy
My days and nights were full of joy,
My mates were blithe and kind!
No wonder that I sometimes sigh,
And dash the tear-drop from my eye,
To cast a look behind!

BALLAD

It was not in the Winter
Our loving lot was cast;
It was the Time of Roses,—
We pluck'd them as we pass'd!

That churlish season never frown'd
On early lovers yet:—
Oh, no—the world was newly crown'd
With flowers when first we met!

'Twas twilight, and I bade you go,
But still you held me fast;
It was the Time of Roses,—
We pluck'd them as we pass'd.—

What else could peer thy glowing cheek,
That tears began to stud?
And when I ask'd the like of Love,
You snatch'd a damask bud;

And oped it to the dainty core,
Still glowing to the last.—
It was the Time of Roses,—
We pluck'd them as we pass'd!

TIME, HOPE, AND MEMORY

I HEARD a gentle maiden, in the spring,
Set her sweet sighs to music, and thus sing:
"Fly through the world, and I will follow thee,
Only for looks that may turn back on me;

"Only for roses that your chance may throw—
Though wither'd—I will wear them on my brow,
To be a thoughtful fragrance to my brain,—
Warm'd with such love, that they will bloom again.

"Thy love before thee, I must tread behind,
Kissing thy foot-prints, though to me unkind;
But trust not all her fondness, though it seem,
Lest thy true love should rest on a false dream.

"Her face is smiling, and her voice is sweet;
But smiles betray, and music sings deceit;
And words speak false;—yet, if they welcome prove,
I'll be their echo, and repeat their love.

"Only if waken'd to sad truth, at last,
The bitterness to come, and sweetness past;
When thou art vext, then turn again, and see
Thou hast loved Hope, but Memory loved thee."

FLOWERS

I WILL not have the mad Clytie,
Whose head is turn'd by the sun;
The tulip is a courtly quean,
Whom, therefore, I will shun;
The cowslip is a country wench,
The violet is a nun;—
But I will woo the dainty rose,
The queen of every one.

The pea is but a wanton witch,
In too much haste to wed,
And clasps her rings on every hand;
The wolfsbane I should dread;
Nor will I dreary rosemarye,
That always mourns the dead;—
But I will woo the dainty rose,
With her cheeks of tender red.

The lily is all in white, like a saint,
And so is no mate for me—
And the daisy's cheek is tipp'd with a blush,
She is of such low degree;
Jasmine is sweet, and has many loves,
And the broom's betroth'd to the bee;—
But I will plight with the dainty rose,
For fairest of all is she.

BALLAD

SHE's up and gone, the graceless girl,
  And robb'd my failing years!
My blood before was thin and cold
  But now 'tis turn'd to tears;—
My shadow falls upon my grave,
  So near the brink I stand,
She might have stay'd a little yet,
  And led me by the hand!

Aye, call her on the barren moor,
  And call her on the hill:
'Tis nothing but the heron's cry,
  And plover's answer shrill;
My child is flown on wilder wings
  Than they have ever spread,
And I may even walk a waste
  That widen'd when she fled.

Full many a thankless child has been,
  But never one like mine;
Her meat was served on plates of gold,
  Her drink was rosy wine;
But now she'll share the robin's food,
  And sup the common rill,
Before her feet will turn again
  To meet her father's will!

RUTH

SHE stood breast high amid the corn
Clasp'd by the golden light of morn,
Like the sweetheart of the sun,
Who many a glowing kiss had won.

On her cheek an autumn flush,
Deeply ripen'd ;—such a blush
In the midst of brown was born,
Like red poppies grown with corn.

Round her eyes her tresses fell,
Which were blackest none could tell,
But long lashes veil'd a light,
That had else been all too bright.

And her hat, with shady brim,
Made her tressy forehead dim ;—
Thus she stood amid the stooks,
Praising God with sweetest looks :—

Sure, I said, Heav'n did not mean,
Where I reap thou shouldst but glean,
Lay thy sheaf adown and come,
Share my harvest and my home.

THE PLEA OF THE MIDSUMMER FAIRIES

I

'Twas in that mellow season of the year
When the hot sun singes the yellow leaves
Till they be gold,—and with a broader sphere
The Moon looks down on Ceres and her sheaves; cool
When more abundantly the spider weaves,
And the cold wind breathes from a chillier clime;—
That forth I fared, on one of those still eves,
Touch'd with the dewy sadness of the time,
To think how the bright months had spent their prime,

II

So that, wherever I address'd my way,
I seem'd to track the melancholy feet
Of him that is the Father of Decay,
And spoils at once the sour weed and the sweet;—
Wherefore regretfully I made retreat
To some unwasted regions of my brain,
Charm'd with the light of summer and the heat,
And bade that bounteous season bloom again,
And sprout fresh flowers in mine own domain.

III

It was a shady and sequester'd scene,
Like those famed gardens of Boccaccio,
Planted with his own laurels evergreen,
And roses that for endless summer blow;
And there were fountain springs to overflow
Their marble basins,—and cool green arcades
Of tall o'erarching sycamores, to throw
Athwart the dappled path their dancing shades,—
With timid coneys cropping the green blades.

IV

And there were crystal pools, peopled with fish,
Argent and gold; and some of Tyrian skin,
Some crimson-barr'd;—and ever at a wish
They rose obsequious till the wave grew thin
As glass upon their backs, and then dived in,
Quenching their ardent scales in watery gloom;
Whilst others with fresh hues row'd forth to win
My changeable regard,—for so we doom
Things born of thought to vanish or to bloom.

V

And there were many birds of many dyes,
From tree to tree still faring to and fro,
And stately peacocks with their splendid eyes,
And gorgeous pheasants with their golden glow,
Like Iris just bedabbled in her bow,
Besides some vocalists, without a name,
That oft on fairy errands come and go,
With accents magical;—and all were tame,
And peckled at my hand where'er I came.

VI

And for my sylvan company, in lieu
Of Pampinea with her lively peers,
Sate Queen Titania with her pretty crew,
All in their liveries quaint, with elfin gears,
For she was gracious to my childish years,
And made me free of her enchanted round;
Wherefore this dreamy scene she still endears,
And plants her court upon a verdant mound,
Fenced with umbrageous woods and groves profound.

VII

"Ah me," she cries, "was ever moonlight seen
So clear and tender for our midnight trips?
Go some one forth, and with a trump convene
My lieges all!"—Away the goblin skips
A pace or two apart, and deftly strips
The ruddy skin from a sweet rose's cheek,
Then blows the shuddering leaf between his lips,
Making it utter forth a shrill small shriek,
Like a fray'd bird in the grey owlet's beak.

VIII

And lo! upon my fix'd delighted ken
Appear'd the loyal Fays.—Some by degrees
Crept from the primrose buds that open'd then,
And some from bell-shaped blossoms like the bees,
Some from the dewy meads, and rushy leas,
Flew up like chafers when the rustics pass;
Some from the rivers, others from tall trees
Dropp'd, like shed blossoms, silent to the grass,
Spirits and elfins small, of every class.

IX

Peri and Pixy, and quaint Puck the Antic,
Brought Robin Goodfellow, that merry swain;
And stealthy Mab, queen of old realms romantic,
Came too, from distance, in her tiny wain,
Fresh dripping from a cloud—some bloomy rain,
Then circling the bright Moon, had wash'd her car,
And still bedew'd it with a various stain:
Lastly came Ariel, shooting from a star,
Who bears all fairy embassies afar.

X

But Oberon, that night elsewhere exiled,
Was absent, whether some distemper'd spleen
Kept him and his fair mate unreconciled,
Or warfare with the Gnome (whose race had been
Sometime obnoxious), kept him from his queen,
And made her now peruse the starry skies
Prophetical, with such an absent mien;
Howbeit, the tears stole often to her eyes,
And oft the Moon was incensed with her sighs—

XI

Which made the elves sport drearily, and soon
Their hushing dances languish'd to a stand,
Like midnight leaves, when, as the Zephyrs swoon,
All on their drooping stems they sink unfann'd,—
So into silence droop'd the fairy band,
To see their empress dear so pale and still,
Crowding her softly round on either hand,
As pale as frosty snowdrops, and as chill,
To whom the sceptred dame reveals her ill.

XII

"Alas," quoth she, "ye know our fairy lives
Are leased upon the fickle faith of men;
Not measured out against Fate's mortal knives,
Like human gossamers,—we perish when
We fade and are forgot in worldly ken,—
Though poesy has thus prolong'd our date,
Thanks be to the sweet Bard's auspicious pen
That rescued us so long!—howbeit of late
I feel some dark misgivings of our fate.

XIII

"And this dull day my melancholy sleep
Hath been so thronged with images of woe,
That even now I cannot choose but weep
To think this was some sad prophetic show
Of future horror to befall us so,—
Of mortal wreck and uttermost distress,—
Yea, our poor empire's fall and overthrow,—
For this was my long vision's dreadful stress,
And when I waked my trouble was not less.

XIV

"Whenever to the clouds I tried to seek,
Such leaden weight dragg'd these Icarian wings,
My faithless wand was wavering and weak,
And slimy toads had trespass'd in our rings—
The birds refused to sing for me—all things
Disown'd their old allegiance to our spells;
The rude bees prick'd me with their rebel stings;
And, when I pass'd, the valley-lily's bells
Rang out, methought, most melancholy knells.

XV

"And ever on the faint and flagging air
A doleful spirit with a dreary note
Cried in my fearful ear, 'Prepare! prepare!'
Which soon I knew came from a raven's throat,
Perch'd on a cypress-bough not far remote,—
A cursed bird, too crafty to be shot,
That alway cometh with his soot-black coat
To make hearts dreary:—for he is a blot
Upon the book of life, as well ye wot!—

XVI

"Wherefore some while I bribed him to be mute,
With bitter acorns stuffing his foul maw,
Which barely I appeased, when some fresh bruit
Startled me all aheap!—and soon I saw
The horridest shape that ever raised my awe,—
A monstrous giant, very huge and tall,
Such as in elder times, devoid of law,
With wicked might grieved the primeval ball,
And this was sure the deadliest of them all!

XVII

"Gaunt was he as a wolf of Languedoc,
With bloody jaws, and frost upon his crown;
So from his barren poll one hoary lock
Over his wrinkled front fell far adown,
Well nigh to where his frosty brows did frown
Like jaggëd icicles at cottage eaves;
And for his coronal he wore some brown
And bristled ears gather'd from Ceres' sheaves,
Entwined with certain sere and russet leaves.

XVIII

"And lo! upon a mast rear'd far aloft,
He bore a very bright and crescent blade,
The which he waved so dreadfully, and oft,
In meditative spite, that, sore dismay'd,
I crept into an acorn-cup for shade;
Meanwhile the horrid effigy went by:
I trow his look was dreadful, for it made
The trembling birds betake them to the sky,
For every leaf was lifted by his sigh.

XIX

"And ever, as he sigh'd, his foggy breath
Blurr'd out the landscape like a flight of smoke:
Thence knew I this was either dreary Death
Or Time, who leads all creatures to his stroke.
Ah wretched me!"—Here, even as she spoke,
The melancholy Shape came gliding in,
And lean'd his back against an antique oak,
Folding his wings, that were so fine and thin,
They scarce were seen against the Dryad's skin.

XX

Then what a fear seized all the little rout!
Look how a flock of panick'd sheep will stare—
And huddle close—and start—and wheel about,
Watching the roaming mongrel here and there,—
So did that sudden Apparition scare
All close aheap those small affrighted things;
Nor sought they now the safety of the air,
As if some leaden spell withheld their wings;
But who can fly that ancientest of Kings?

XXI

Whom now the Queen, with a forestalling tear
And previous sigh, beginneth to entreat,
Bidding him spare, for love, her lieges dear:
"Alas!" quoth she, "is there no nodding wheat
Ripe for thy crooked weapon, and more meet,—
Or wither'd leaves to ravish from the tree,—
Or crumbling battlements for thy defeat?
Think but what vaunting monuments there be
Builded in spite and mockery of thee.

XXII

"O fret away the fabric walls of Fame,
And grind down marble Cæsars with the dust:
Make tombs inscriptionless—raze each high name,
And waste old armours of renown with rust:
Do all of this, and thy revenge is just:
Make such decays the trophies of thy prime,
And check Ambition's overweening lust,
That dares exterminating war with Time,—
But we are guiltless of that lofty crime.

XXIII

"Frail feeble sprites!—the children of a dream!
Leased on the sufferance of fickle men,
Like motes dependent on the sunny beam,
Living but in the sun's indulgent ken,
And when that light withdraws, withdrawing then;—
So do we flutter in the glance of youth
And fervid fancy,—and so perish when
The eye of faith grows agëd;—in sad truth,
Feeling thy sway, O Time! though not thy tooth!

XXIV

"Where be those old divinities forlorn,
That dwelt in trees, or haunted in a stream?
Alas! their memories are dimm'd and torn,
Like the remainder tatters of a dream:
So will it fare with our poor thrones, I deem;—
For us the same dark trench Oblivion delves,
That holds the wastes of every human scheme.
O spare us then,—and these our pretty elves,—
We soon, alas! shall perish of ourselves!"

le havocs
a briar,
grisly

XXV

Now as she ended, with a sigh, to name
Those old Olympians, scatter'd by the whirl
Of Fortune's giddy wheel and brought to shame,
Methought a scornful and malignant curl
Show'd on the lips of that malicious churl,
To think what noble havocs he had made;
So that I fear'd he all at once would hurl
The harmless fairies into endless shade,—
Howbeit he stopp'd awhile to whet his blade.

XXVI

Pity it was to hear the elfins' wail
Rise up in concert from their mingled dread,
Pity it was to see them, all so pale,
Gaze on the grass as for a dying bed;—
But Puck was seated on a spider's thread,
That hung between two branches of a briar,
And 'gan to swing and gambol, heels o'er head,
Like any Southwark tumbler on a wire,
For him no present grief could long inspire.

XXVII

Meanwhile the Queen with many piteous drops,
Falling like tiny sparks full fast and free,
Bedews a pathway from her throne;—and stops
Before the foot of her arch enemy,
And with her little arms enfolds his knee,
That shows more grisly from that fair embrace;
But she will ne'er depart. "Alas!" quoth she,
"My painful fingers I will here enlace
Till I have gain'd your pity for our race.

XXVIII

"What have we ever done to earn this grudge,
And hate—(if not too humble for thy hating?)—
Look o'er our labours and our lives, and judge
If there be any ills of our creating;
For we are very kindly creatures, dating
With nature's charities still sweet and bland:—
O think this murder worthy of debating!"
Herewith she makes a signal with her hand,
To beckon some one from the Fairy band.

XXIX

Anon I saw one of those elfin things,
Clad all in white like any chorister,
Come fluttering forth on his melodious wings,
That made soft music at each little stir,
But something louder than a bee's demur
Before he lights upon a bunch of broom,
And thus 'gan he with Saturn to confer,—
And O his voice was sweet, touch'd with the gloom
Of that sad theme that argued of his doom!

XXX

Quoth he, "We make all melodies our care,
That no false discords may offend the Sun,
Music's great master—tuning everywhere
All pastoral sounds and melodies, each one
Duly to place and season, so that none
May harshly interfere. We rouse at morn
The shrill sweet lark; and when the day is done,
Hush silent pauses for the bird forlorn,
That singeth with her breast against a thorn.

XXXI

"We gather in loud choirs the twittering race,
That make a chorus with their single note;
And tend on new-fledged birds in every place,
That duly they may get their tunes by rote;
And oft, like echoes, answering remote,
We hide in thickets from the feather'd throng,
And strain in rivalship each throbbing throat,
Singing in shrill responses all day long,
Whilst the glad truant listens to our song.

XXXII

"Wherefore, great King of Years, as thou dost love
The raining music from a morning cloud,
When vanish'd larks are carolling above,
To wake Apollo with their pipings loud;—
If ever thou hast heard in leafy shroud
The sweet and plaintive Sappho of the dell,
Show thy sweet mercy on this little crowd,
And we will muffle up the sheepfold bell
Whene'er thou listenest to Philomel."

XXXIII

Then Saturn thus:—"Sweet is the merry lark,
That carols in man's ear so clear and strong;
And youth must love to listen in the dark
That tuneful elegy of Tereus' wrong;
But I have heard that ancient strain too long,
For sweet is sweet but when a little strange,
And I grow weary for some newer song;
For wherefore had I wings, unless to range
Through all things mutable, from change to change?

XXXIV

"But wouldst thou hear the melodies of Time,
Listen when sleep and drowsy darkness roll
Over hush'd cities, and the midnight chime
Sounds from their hundred clocks, and deep bells toll
Like a last knell over the dead world's soul,
Saying, 'Time shall be final of all things,
Whose late, last voice must elegise the whole,'—
O then I clap aloft my brave broad wings,
And make the wide air tremble while it rings!"

XXXV

Then next a fair Eve-Fay made meek address,
Saying, "We be the handmaids of the Spring;
In sign whereof, May, the quaint broideress,
Hath wrought her samplers on our gauzy wing.
We tend upon buds' birth and blossoming,
And count the leafy tributes that they owe—
As, so much to the earth—so much to fling
In showers to the brook—so much to go
In whirlwinds to the clouds that made them grow.

XXXVI

"The pastoral cowslips are our little pets,
And daisy stars, whose firmament is green;
Pansies, and those veil'd nuns, meek violets,
Sighing to that warm world from which they screen;
And golden daffodils, pluck'd for May's Queen;
And lonely harebells, quaking on the heath;
And Hyacinth, long since a fair youth seen,
Whose tuneful voice, turn'd fragrance in his breath,
Kiss'd by sad Zephyr, guilty of his death.

XXXVII

"The widow'd primrose weeping to the moon
And saffron crocus in whose chalice bright
A cool libation hoarded for the noon
Is kept—and she that purifies the light,
The virgin lily, faithful to her white,
Whereon Eve wept in Eden for her shame;
And the most dainty rose, Aurora's spright,
Our every godchild, by whatever name—
Spare us our lives, for we did nurse the same!"

XXXVIII

Then that old Mower stamp'd his heel, and struck
His hurtful scythe against the harmless ground,
Saying, "Ye foolish imps, when am I stuck
With gaudy buds, or like a wooer crown'd
With flow'ry chaplets, save when they are found
Wither'd?—Whenever have I pluck'd a rose,
Except to scatter its vain leaves around?
For so all gloss of beauty I oppose,
And bring decay on every flow'r that blows.

XXXIX

"Or when am I so wroth as when I view
The wanton pride of Summer;—how she decks
The birthday world with blossoms ever-new,
As if Time had not lived, and heap'd great wrecks
Of years on years?—O then I bravely vex
And catch the gay Months in their gaudy plight,
And slay them with the wreaths about their necks,
Like foolish heifers in the holy rite,
And raise great trophies to my ancient might."

XL

Then saith another, "We are kindly things,
And like her offspring nestle with the dove,—
Witness these hearts embroider'd on our wings,
To show our constant patronage of love:—
We sit at even, in sweet bow'rs above
Lovers, and shake rich odours on the air,
To mingle with their sighs; and still remove
The startling owl, and bid the bat forbear
Their privacy, and haunt some other where.

XLI

"And we are near the mother when she sits
Beside her infant in its wicker bed;
And we are in the fairy scene that flits
Across its tender brain: sweet dreams we shed,
And whilst the tender little soul is fled
Away, to sport with our young elves, the while
We touch the dimpled cheek with roses red,
And tickle the soft lips until they smile,
So that their careful parents they beguile.

XLII

"O then, if ever thou hast breathed a vow
At Love's dear portal, or at pale moon-rise
Crush'd the dear curl on a regardful brow,
That did not frown thee from thy honey prize—
If ever thy sweet son sat on thy thighs,
And wooed thee from thy careful thoughts within
To watch the harmless beauty of his eyes,
Or glad thy fingers on his smooth soft skin,
For Love's dear sake, let us thy pity win!"

XLIII

Then Saturn fiercely thus:—"What joy have I
In tender babes, that have devour'd mine own,
Whenever to the light I heard them cry,
Till foolish Rhea cheated me with stone?
Whereon, till now, is my great hunger shown,
In monstrous dint of my enormous tooth;
And—but the peopled world is too full grown
For hunger's edge—I would consume all youth
At one great meal, without delay or ruth!

XLIV

"For I am well nigh crazed and wild to hear
How boastful fathers taunt me with their breed,
Saying, 'We shall not die nor disappear,
But, in these other selves, ourselves succeed
Ev'n as ripe flowers pass into their seed
Only to be renew'd from prime to prime,'
All of which boastings I am forced to read,
Besides a thousand challenges to Time,
Which bragging lovers have compiled in rhyme.

XLV

"Wherefore, when they are sweetly met o' nights,
There will I steal and with my hurried hand
Startle them suddenly from their delights
Before the next encounter hath been plann'd,
Ravishing hours in little minutes spann'd;
But when they say farewell, and grieve apart,
Then like a leaden statue I will stand,
Meanwhile their many tears encrust my dart,
And with a ragged edge cut heart from heart."

XLVI

Then next a merry Woodsman, clad in green,
Stept vanward from his mates, that idly stood
Each at his proper ease, as they had been
Nursed in the liberty of old Shérwood,
And wore the livery of Robin Hood,
Who wont in forest shades to dine and sup,—
So came this chief right frankly, and made good
His haunch against his axe, and thus spoke up,
Doffing his cap, which was an acorn's cup :—

XLVII

"We be small foresters and gay, who tend
On trees, and all their furniture of green,
Training the young boughs airily to bend,
And show blue snatches of the sky between ;—
Or knit more close intricacies, to screen
Birds' crafty dwellings, as may hide them best,
But most the timid blackbird's—she that, seen,
Will bear black poisonous berries to her nest,
Lest man should cage the darlings of her breast.

XLVIII

"We bend each tree in proper attitude,
And founting willows train in silvery falls ;
We frame all shady roofs and arches rude,
And verdant aisles leading to Dryads' halls,
Or deep recesses where the Echo calls ;—
We shape all plumy trees against the sky,
And carve tall elms' Corinthian capitals,—
When sometimes, as our tiny hatchets ply,
Men say, the tapping woodpecker is nigh.

XLIX

"Sometimes we scoop the squirrel's hollow cell,
And sometimes carve quaint letters on trees' rind,
That haply some lone musing wight may spell
Dainty Aminta,—Gentle Rosalind,—
Or chastest Laura,—sweetly call'd to mind
In sylvan solitudes, ere he lies down;—
And sometimes we enrich grey stems with twined
And vagrant ivy,—or rich moss, whose brown
Burns into gold as the warm sun goes down.

L

"And, lastly, for mirth's sake and Christmas cheer,
We bear the seedling berries, for increase,
To graft the Druid oaks, from year to year,
Careful that mistletoe may never cease;—
Wherefore, if thou dost prize the shady peace
Of sombre forests, or to see light break
Through sylvan cloisters, and in spring release
Thy spirit amongst leaves from careful ake,
Spare us our lives for the Green Dryad's sake."

LI

Then Saturn, with a frown:—"Go forth, and fell
Oak for your coffins, and thenceforth lay by
Your axes for the rust, and bid farewell
To all sweet birds, and the blue peeps of sky
Through tangled branches, for ye shall not spy
The next green generation of the tree;
But hence with the dead leaves, whene'er they fly,—
Which in the bleak air I would rather see,
Than flights of the most tuneful birds that be.

LII

"For I dislike all prime, and verdant pets,
Ivy except, that on the aged wall
Preys with its worm-like roots, and daily frets
The crumbled tower it seems to league withal,
King-like, worn down by its own coronal:—
Neither in forest haunts love I to won,
Before the golden plumage 'gins to fall,
And leaves the brown bleak limbs with few leaves on,
Or bare—like Nature in her skeleton.

LIII

"For then sit I amongst the crooked boughs,
Wooing dull Memory with kindred sighs;
And there in rustling nuptials we espouse,
Smit by the sadness in each other's eyes;—
But Hope must have green bowers and blue skies,
And must be courted with the gauds of Spring;
Whilst Youth leans god-like on her lap, and cries,
'What shall we always do, but love and sing?'—
And Time is reckon'd a discarded thing."

LIV

Here in my dream it made me fret to see
How Puck, the antic, all this dreary while
Had blithely jested with calamity,
With mis-timed mirth mocking the doleful style
Of his sad comrades, till it raised my bile
To see him so reflect their grief aside,
Turning their solemn looks to half a smile—
Like a straight stick shown crooked in the tide;—
But soon a novel advocate I spied.

LV

Quoth he—"We teach all natures to fulfil
Their fore-appointed crafts, and instincts meet,—
The bee's sweet alchemy,—the spider's skill,—
The pismire's care to garner up his wheat,—
And rustic masonry to swallows fleet,—
The lapwing's cunning to preserve her nest,—
But most, that lesser pelican, the sweet
And shrilly ruddock, with its bleeding breast,
Its tender pity of poor babes distrest.

LVI

"Sometimes we cast our shapes, and in sleek skins
Delve with the timid mole, that aptly delves
From our example; so the spider spins,
And eke the silk-worm, pattern'd by ourselves:
Sometimes we travail on the summer shelves
Of early bees, and busy toils commence,
Watch'd of wise men, that know not we are elves,
But gaze and marvel at our stretch of sense,
And praise our human-like intelligence.

LVII

"Wherefore, by thy delight in that old tale,
And plaintive dirges the late robins sing,
What time the leaves are scatter'd by the gale,
Mindful of that old forest burying;—
As thou dost love to watch each tiny thing,
For whom our craft most curiously contrives,
If thou hast caught a bee upon the wing,
To take his honey-bag,—spare us our lives,
And we will pay the ransom in full hives."

LVIII

"Now by my glass," quoth Time, "ye do offend
In teaching the brown bees that careful lore,
And frugal ants, whose millions would have end,
But they lay up for need a timely store,
And travail with the seasons evermore;
Whereas Great Mammoth long hath pass'd away,
And none but I can tell what hide he wore;
Whilst purblind men, the creatures of a day,
In riddling wonder his great bones survey."

LIX

Then came an elf, right beauteous to behold,
Whose coat was like a brooklet that the sun
Hath all embroider'd with its crooked gold,
It was so quaintly wrought and overrun
With spangled traceries,—most meet for one
That was a warden of the pearly streams;—
And as he stept out of the shadows dun,
His jewels sparkled in the pale moon's gleams,
And shot into the air their pointed beams.

LX

Quoth he,—"We bear the gold and silver keys
Of bubbling springs and fountains, that below
Course thro' the veiny earth,—which when they freeze
Into hard crysolites, we bid to flow,
Creeping like subtle snakes, when, as they go,
We guide their windings to melodious falls,
At whose soft murmurings, so sweet and low,
Poets have tuned their smoothest madrigals,
To sing to ladies in their banquet-halls.

LXI

"And when the hot sun with his steadfast heat
Parches the river god,—whose dusty urn
Drips miserly, till soon his crystal feet
Against his pebbly floor wax faint and burn
And languid fish, unpoised, grow sick and yearn,—
Then scoop we hollows in some sandy nook,
And little channels dig, wherein we turn
The thread-worn rivulet, that all forsook
The Naiad-lily, pining for her brook.

LXII

"Wherefore, by thy delight in cool green meads,
With living sapphires daintily inlaid,—
In all soft songs of waters and their reeds,—
And all reflections in a streamlet made,
Haply of thy own love, that, disarray'd,
Kills the fair lily with a livelier white,—
By silver trouts upspringing from green shade,
And winking stars reduplicate at night,
Spare us, poor ministers to such delight."

LXIII

Howbeit his pleading and his gentle looks
Moved not the spiteful Shade:—Quoth he, "Your taste
Shoots wide of mine, for I despise the brooks
And slavish rivulets that run to waste
In noontide sweats, or, like poor vassals, haste
To swell the vast dominion of the sea,
In whose great presence I am held disgraced,
And neighbour'd with a king that rivals me
In ancient might and hoary majesty.

LXIV

"Whereas I ruled in Chaos, and still keep
The awful secrets of that ancient dearth,
Before the briny fountains of the deep
Brimm'd up the hollow cavities of earth ;—
I saw each trickling Sea-God at his birth,
Each pearly Naiad with her oozy locks,
And infant Titans of enormous girth,
Whose huge young feet yet stumbled on the rocks,
Stunning the early world with frequent shocks.

LXV

"Where now is Titan, with his cumbrous brood,
That scared the world ?—By this sharp scythe they fell,
And half the sky was curdled with their blood :
So have all primal giants sigh'd farewell.
No wardens now by sedgy fountains dwell,
Nor pearly Naiads. All their days are done
That strove with Time, untimely, to excel ;
Wherefore I razed their progenies, and none
But my great shadow intercepts the sun !"

LXVI

Then saith the timid Fay—"Oh, mighty Time !
Well hast thou wrought the cruel Titans' fall,
For they were stain'd with many a bloody crime :
Great giants work great wrongs,—but we are small,
For love goes lowly ;—but Oppression 's tall,
And with surpassing strides goes foremost still
Where love indeed can hardly reach at all ;
Like a poor dwarf o'erburthen'd with good will,
That labours to efface the tracks of ill.—

LXVII

"Man even strives with Man, but we eschew
The guilty feud, and all fierce strifes abhor;
Nay, we are gentle as the sweet heaven's dew,
Beside the red and horrid drops of war,
Weeping the cruel hates men battle for,
Which worldly bosoms nourish in our spite:
For in the gentle breast we ne'er withdraw,
But only when all love hath taken flight,
And youth's warm gracious heart is harden'd quite.

LXVIII

"So are our gentle natures intertwined
With sweet humanities, and closely knit
In kindly sympathy with human kind.
Witness how we befriend, with elfin wit,
All hopeless maids and lovers,—nor omit
Magical succours unto hearts forlorn:—
We charm man's life, and do not perish it;—
So judge us by the helps we showed this morn,
To one who held his wretched days in scorn.

LXIX

"'Twas nigh sweet Amwell;—for the Queen had task'd
Our skill to-day amidst the silver Lea,
Whereon the noontide sun had not yet bask'd;
Wherefore some patient man we thought to see,
Planted in moss-grown rushes to the knee,
Beside the cloudy margin cold and dim;—
Howbeit no patient fisherman was he
That cast his sudden shadow from the brim,
Making us leave our toils to gaze on him.

LXX

"His face was ashy pale, and leaden care
Had sunk the levell'd arches of his brow,
Once bridges for his joyous thoughts to fare
Over those melancholy springs and slow,
That from his piteous eyes began to flow,
And fell anon into the chilly stream;
Which, as his mimick'd image show'd below,
Wrinkled his face with many a needless seam,
Making grief sadder in its own esteem.

LXXI

"And lo! upon the air we saw him stretch
His passionate arms; and, in a wayward strain,
He 'gan to elegise that fellow wretch
That with mute gestures answer'd him again,
Saying, 'Poor slave, how long wilt thou remain
Life's sad weak captive in a prison strong,
Hoping with tears to rust away thy chain,
In bitter servitude to worldly wrong?—
Thou wear'st that mortal livery too long!'

LXXII

"This, with more spleenful speeches and some tears,
When he had spent upon the imaged wave,
Speedily I convened my elfin peers
Under the lily-cups, that we might save
This woeful mortal from a wilful grave
By shrewd diversions of his mind's regret,
Seeing he was mere Melancholy's slave,
That sank wherever a dark cloud he met,
And straight was tangled in her secret net.

LXXIII

"Therefore, as still he watch'd the water's flow,
Daintily we transform'd, and with bright fins
Came glancing through the gloom; some from below
Rose like dim fancies when a dream begins,
Snatching the light upon their purple skins;
Then under the broad leaves made slow retire:
One like a golden galley bravely wins
Its radiant course,—another glows like fire,—
Making that wayward man our pranks admire.

LXXIV

"And so he banish'd thought, and quite forgot
All contemplation of that wretched face;
And so we wiled him from that lonely spot
Along the river's brink; till, by heaven's grace,
He met a gentle haunter of the place,
Full of sweet wisdom gather'd from the brooks,
Who there discuss'd his melancholy case
With wholesome texts learn'd from kind nature's books,
Meanwhile he newly trimm'd his lines and hooks."

LXXV

Herewith the Fairy ceased. Quoth Ariel now—
"Let me remember how I saved a man,
Whose fatal noose was fasten'd on a bough,
Intended to abridge his sad life's span;
For haply I was by when he began
His stern soliloquy in life's dispraise,
And overheard his melancholy plan,
How he had made a vow to end his days,
And therefore follow'd him in all his ways,

Till

arms

LXXVI

"Through brake and tangled copse, for much he loathed
All populous haunts, and roam'd in forests rude,
To hide himself from man. But I had clothed
My delicate limbs with plumes, and still pursued,
Where only foxes and wild cats intrude,
Till we were come beside an ancient tree
Late blasted by a storm. Here he renew'd
His loud complaints,—choosing that spot to be
The scene of his last horrid tragedy.

LXXVII

"It was a wild and melancholy glen,
Made gloomy by tall firs and cypress dark,
Whose roots, like any bones of buried men,
Push'd through the rotten sod for fear's remark;
A hundred horrid stems, jagged and stark,
Wrestled with crooked arms in hideous fray,
Besides sleek ashes with their dappled bark,
Like crafty serpents climbing for a prey,
With many blasted oaks moss-grown and grey.

LXXVIII

"But here upon his final desperate clause
Suddenly I pronounced so sweet a strain,
Like a pang'd nightingale, it made him pause,
Till half the frenzy of his grief was slain,
The sad remainder oozing from his brain
In timely ecstasies of healing tears,
Which through his ardent eyes began to drain;—
Meanwhile the deadly Fates unclosed their shears:—
So pity me and all my fated peers!"

LXXIX

Thus Ariel ended, and was some time hush'd:
When with the hoary shape a fresh tongue pleads,
And red as rose the gentle Fairy blush'd
To read the records of her own good deeds:—
"It chanced," quoth she, "in seeking through the meads
For honied cowslips, sweetest in the morn,
Whilst yet the buds were hung with dewy beads,
And Echo answer'd to the huntsman's horn,
We found a babe left in the swarths forlorn.

LXXX

"A little, sorrowful, deserted thing,
Begot of love, and yet no love begetting;
Guiltless of shame, and yet for shame to wring;
And too soon banish'd from a mother's petting,
To churlish nurture and the wide world's fretting,
For alien pity and unnatural care;—
Alas! to see how the cold dew kept wetting
His childish coats, and dabbled all his hair,
Like gossamers across his forehead fair.

LXXXI

"His pretty pouting mouth, witless of speech,
Lay half-way open like a rose-lipp'd shell;
And his young cheek was softer than a peach,
Whereon his tears, for roundness, could not dwell,
But quickly roll'd themselves to pearls, and fell,
Some on the grass, and some against his hand,
Or haply wander'd to the dimpled well,
Which love beside his mouth had sweetly plann'd,
Yet not for tears, but mirth and smilings bland.

LXXXII

"Pity it was to see those frequent tears
Falling regardless from his friendless eyes;
There was such beauty in those twin blue spheres,
As any mother's heart might leap to prize;
Blue were they, like the zenith of the skies
Soften'd betwixt two clouds, both clear and mild;—
Just touch'd with thought, and yet not over wise,
They show'd the gentle spirit of a child,
Not yet by care or any craft defiled.

LXXXIII

"Pity it was to see the ardent sun
Scorching his helpless limbs—it shone so warm;
For kindly shade or shelter he had none,
Nor mother's gentle breast, come fair or storm.
Meanwhile I bade my pitying mates transform
Like grasshoppers, and then, with shrilly cries,
All round the infant noisily we swarm,
Haply some passing rustic to advise—
Whilst providential Heaven our care espies,

LXXXIV

"And sends full soon a tender-hearted hind,
Who, wond'ring at our loud unusual note,
Strays curiously aside, and so doth find
The orphan child laid in the grass remote,
And laps the foundling in his russet coat,
Who thence was nurtured in his kindly cot:—
But how he prosper'd let proud London quote,
How wise, how rich, and how renown'd he got,
And chief of all her citizens, I wot.

LXXXV

"Witness his goodly vessels on the Thames,
Whose holds were fraught with costly merchandise,—
Jewels from Ind, and pearls for courtly dames,
And gorgeous silks that Samarcand supplies:
Witness that Royal Bourse he bade arise,
The mart of merchants from the East and West;
Whose slender summit, pointing to the skies,
Still bears, in token of his grateful breast,
The tender grasshopper, his chosen crest—

LXXXVI

"The tender grasshopper, his chosen crest,
That all the summer, with a tuneful wing,
Makes merry chirpings in its grassy nest,
Inspirited with dew to leap and sing:—
So let us also live, eternal King!
Partakers of the green and pleasant earth:—
Pity it is to slay the meanest thing,
That, like a mote, shines in the smile of mirth:—
Enough there is of joy's decrease and dearth!

LXXXVII

"Enough of pleasure, and delight, and beauty,
Perish'd and gone, and hasting to decay;—
Enough to sadden even thee, whose duty
Or spite it is to havoc and to slay:
Too many a lovely race razed quite away,
Hath left large gaps in life and human loving:—
Here then begin thy cruel war to stay,
And spare fresh sighs, and tears, and groans, reproving
Thy desolating hand for our removing."

LXXXVIII

Now here I heard a shrill and sudden cry,
And, looking up, I saw the antic Puck
Grappling with Time, who clutch'd him like a fly,
Victim of his own sport,—the jester's luck!
He, whilst his fellows grieved, poor wight, had stuck
His freakish gauds upon the Ancient's brow,
And now his ear, and now his beard, would pluck;
Whereas the angry churl had snatch'd him now,
Crying, "Thou impish mischief, who art thou?"

LXXXIX

"Alas!" quoth Puck, "a little random elf,
Born in the sport of nature, like a weed,
For simple sweet enjoyment of myself,
But for no other purpose, worth, or need;
And yet withal of a most happy breed;
And there is Robin Goodfellow besides,
My partner dear in many a prankish deed
To make dame Laughter hold her jolly sides,
Like merry mummers twain on holy tides.

XC

"'Tis we that bob the angler's idle cork,
Till e'en the patient man breathes half a curse;
We steal the morsel from the gossip's fork,
And curdling looks with secret straws disperse,
Or stop the sneezing chanter at mid verse:
And when an infant's beauty prospers ill,
We change, some mothers say, the child at nurse:
But any graver purpose to fulfil,
We have not wit enough, and scarce the will.

XCI

“We never let the canker melancholy
To gather on our faces like a rust,
But glass our features with some change of folly,
Taking life’s fabled miseries on trust,
But only sorrowing when sorrow must:
We ruminate no sage’s solemn cud,
But own ourselves a pinch of lively dust
To frisk upon a wind,—whereas the flood
Of tears would turn us into heavy mud.

XCII

“Beshrew those sad interpreters of nature,
Who gloze her lively universal law,
As if she had not form’d our cheerful feature
To be so tickled with the slightest straw!
So let them vex their mumping mouths, and draw
The corners downward, like a wat’ry moon,
And deal in gusty sighs and rainy flaw—
We will not woo foul weather all too soon,
Or nurse November on the lap of June.

XCIII

“For ours are winging sprites, like any bird,
That shun all stagnant settlements of grief;
And even in our rest our hearts are stirr’d,
Like insects settled on a dancing leaf:—
This is our small philosophy in brief,
Which thus to teach hath set me all agape:
But dost thou relish it? O hoary chief!
Unclasp thy crooked fingers from my nape,
And I will show thee many a pleasant scrape.”

XCIV

Then Saturn thus :—shaking his crooked blade
O'erhead, which made aloft a lightning flash
In all the fairies' eyes, dismally fray'd !
His ensuing voice came like the thunder crash—
Meanwhile the bolt shatters some pine or ash—
"Thou feeble, wanton, foolish, fickle thing !
Whom nought can frighten, sadden, or abash,—
To hope my solemn countenance to wring
To idiot smiles !—but I will prune thy wing !

XCV

"Lo ! this most awful handle of my scythe
Stood once a May-pole, with a flowery crown,
Which rustics danced around, and maidens blithe,
To wanton pipings ;—but I pluck'd it down,
And robed the May Queen in a churchyard gown,
Turning her buds to rosemary and rue ;
And all their merry minstrelsy did drown,
And laid each lusty leaper in the dew ;—
So thou shalt fare—and every jovial crew ! "

XCVI

Here he lets go the struggling imp, to clutch
His mortal engine with each grisly hand,
Which frights the elfin progeny so much,
They huddle in a heap, and trembling stand
All round Titania, like the queen bee's band,
With sighs and tears and very shrieks of woe !—
Meanwhile, some moving argument I plann'd,
To make the stern Shade merciful,—when lo !
He drops his fatal scythe without a blow !

XCVII

For, just at need, a timely Apparition
Steps in between, to bear the awful brunt;
Making him change his horrible position,
To marvel at this comer, brave and blunt,
That dares Time's irresistible affront,
Whose strokes have scarr'd even the gods of old;—
Whereas this seem'd a mortal, at mere hunt
For coneys, lighted by the moonshine cold,
Or stalker of stray deer, stealthy and bold.

XCVIII

Who, turning to the small assembled fays,
Doffs to the lily queen his courteous cap,
And holds her beauty for a while in gaze,
With bright eyes kindling at this pleasant hap;
And thence upon the fair moon's silver map,
As if in question of this magic chance,
Laid like a dream upon the green earth's lap;
And then upon old Saturn turns askance,
Exclaiming, with a glad and kindly glance:—

XCIX

"Oh, these be Fancy's revellers by night!
Stealthy companions of the downy moth—
Diana's motes, that flit in her pale light,
Shunners of sunbeams in diurnal sloth;—
These be the feasters on night's silver cloth;—
The gnat with shrilly trump is their convener,
Forth from their flowery chambers, nothing loth,
With lulling tunes to charm the air serener,
Or dance upon the grass to make it greener.

C

"These be the pretty genii of the flow'rs,
Daintily fed with honey and pure dew—
Midsummer's phantoms in her dreaming hours,
King Oberon, and all his merry crew,
The darling puppets of romance's view;
Fairies, and sprites, and goblin elves we call them,
Famous for patronage of lovers true;—
No harm they act, neither shall harm befall them,
So do not thus with crabbed frowns appal them."

CI

O what a cry was Saturn's then!—it made
The fairies quake. "What care I for their pranks,
However they may lovers choose to aid,
Or dance their roundelays on flow'ry banks?—
Long must they dance before they earn my thanks,—
So step aside, to some far safer spot,
Whilst with my hungry scythe I mow their ranks,
And leave them in the sun, like weeds, to rot,
And with the next day's sun to be forgot."

CII

Anon, he raised afresh his weapon keen;
But still the gracious Shade disarm'd his aim,
Stepping with brave alacrity between,
And made his sere arm powerless and tame.
His be perpetual glory, for the shame
Of hoary Saturn in that grand defeat!—
But I must tell how here Titania came
With all her kneeling lieges, to entreat
His kindly succour, in sad tones, but sweet.

CIII

Saying, "Thou seest a wretched queen before thee,
The fading power of a failing land,
Who for a kingdom kneeleth to implore thee,
Now menaced by this tyrant's spoiling hand;
No one but thee can hopefully withstand
That crooked blade, he longeth so to lift.
I pray thee blind him with his own vile sand,
Which only times all ruins by its drift,
Or prune his eagle wings that are so swift.

CIV

"Or take him by that sole and grizzled tuft,
That hangs upon his bald and barren crown;
And we will sing to see him so rebuff'd,
And lend our little mights to pull him down,
And make brave sport of his malicious frown,
For all his boastful mockery o'er men.
For thou wast born, I know, for this renown,
By my most magical and inward ken,
That readeth ev'n at Fate's forestalling pen.

CV

"Nay, by the golden lustre of thine eye,
And by thy brow's most fair and ample span,
Thought's glorious palace, framed for fancies high,
And by thy cheek thus passionately wan,
I know the signs of an immortal man,—
Nature's chief darling, and illustrious mate,
Destined to foil old Death's oblivious plan,
And shine untarnish'd by the fogs of Fate,
Time's famous rival till the final date!

CVI

"O shield us then from this usurping Time,
And we will visit thee in moonlight dreams;
And teach thee tunes, to wed unto thy rhyme,
And dance about thee in all midnight gleams,
Giving thee glimpses of our magic schemes,
Such as no mortal's eye hath ever seen;
And, for thy love to us in our extremes,
Will ever keep thy chaplet fresh and green,
Such as no poet's wreath hath ever been!

CVII

"And we'll distil thee aromatic dews,
To charm thy sense, when there shall be no flow'rs;
And flavour'd syrups in thy drinks infuse,
And teach the nightingale to haunt thy bow'rs,
And with our games divert thy weariest hours,
With all that elfin wits can e'er devise.
And, this churl dead, there'll be no hasting hours
To rob thee of thy joys, as now joy flies":—
Here she was stopp'd by Saturn's furious cries.

CVIII

Whom, therefore, the kind Shade rebukes anew,
Saying, "Thou haggard Sin, go forth, and scoop
Thy hollow coffin in some churchyard yew,
Or make th' autumnal flow'rs turn pale, and droop;
Or fell the bearded corn, till gleaners stoop
Under fat sheaves,—or blast the piny grove;—
But here thou shalt not harm this pretty group,
Whose lives are not so frail and feebly wove,
But leased on Nature's loveliness and love.

CIX

"'Tis these that free the small entangled fly,
Caught in the venom'd spider's crafty snare;—
These be the petty surgeons that apply
The healing balsams to the wounded hare,
Bedded in bloody fern, no creature's care!—
These be providers for the orphan brood,
Whose tender mother hath been slain in air,
Quitting with gaping bill her darlings' food,
Hard by the verge of her domestic wood.

CX

"'Tis these befriend the timid trembling stag,
When, with a bursting heart beset with fears,
He feels his saving speed begin to flag;
For then they quench the fatal taint with tears,
And prompt fresh shifts in his alarum'd ears,
So piteously they view all bloody morts;
Or if the gunner, with his arm, appears,
Like noisy pyes and jays, with harsh reports,
They warn the wild fowl of his deadly sports.

CXI

"For these are kindly ministers of nature,
To soothe all covert hurts and dumb distress;
Pretty they be, and very small of stature,—
For mercy still consorts with littleness;—
Wherefore the sum of good is still the less,
And mischief grossest in this world of wrong;—
So do these charitable dwarfs redress
The tenfold ravages of giants strong,
To whom great malice and great might belong.

CXII

"Likewise to them are Poets much beholden
For secret favours in the midnight glooms;
Brave Spenser quaff'd out of their goblets golden,
And saw their tables spread of prompt mushrooms,
And heard their horns of honeysuckle blooms
Sounding upon the air most soothing soft,
Like humming bees busy about the brooms,—
And glanced this fair queen's witchery full oft,
And in her magic wain soar'd far aloft.

CXIII

"Nay I myself, though mortal, once was nursed
By fairy gossips, friendly at my birth,
And in my childish ear glib Mab rehearsed
Her breezy travels round our planet's girth,
Telling me wonders of the moon and earth;
My gramarye at her grave lap I conn'd,
Where Puck hath been convened to make me mirth;
I have had from Queen Titania tokens fond,
And toy'd with Oberon's permitted wand.

CXIV

"With figs and plums and Persian dates they fed me,
And delicate cates after my sunset meal,
And took me by my childish hand, and led me
By craggy rocks crested with keeps of steel,
Whose awful bases deep dark woods conceal,
Staining some dead lake with their verdant dyes:
And when the West sparkled at Phœbus' wheel,
With fairy euphrasy they purged mine eyes,
To let me see their cities in the skies.

CXV

"'Twas they first school'd my young imagination
To take its flights like any new-fledged bird,
And show'd the span of winged meditation
Stretch'd wider than things grossly seen or heard.
With sweet swift Ariel how I soar'd and stirr'd
The fragrant blooms of spiritual bow'rs!
'Twas they endear'd what I have still preferr'd,
Nature's blest attributes and balmy pow'rs,
Her hills and vales and brooks, sweet birds and flow'rs!

CXVI

"Wherefore with all true loyalty and duty
Will I regard them in my honouring rhyme,
With love for love, and homages to beauty,
And magic thoughts gather'd in night's cool clime,
With studious verse trancing the dragon Time,
Strong as old Merlin's necromantic spells;
So these dear monarchs of the summer's prime
Shall live unstartled by his dreadful yells,
Till shrill larks warn them to their flowery cells."

CXVII

Look how a poison'd man turns livid black,
Drugg'd with a cup of deadly hellebore,
That sets his horrid features all at rack,—
So seem'd these words into the ear to pour
Of ghastly Saturn, answering with a roar
Of mortal pain and spite and utmost rage,
Wherewith his grisly arm he raised once more,
And bade the cluster'd sinews all engage,
As if at one fell stroke to wreck an age.

CXVIII

Whereas the blade flash'd on the dinted ground,
Down through his steadfast foe, yet made no scar
On that immortal Shade, or death-like wound;
But Time was long benumb'd, and stood ajar,
And then with baffled rage took flight afar,
To weep his hurt in some Cimmerian gloom,
Or meaner fames (like mine) to mock and mar,
Or sharp his scythe for royal strokes of doom,
Whetting its edge on some old Cæsar's tomb.

CXIX

Howbeit he vanish'd in the forest shade,
Distantly heard as if some grumbling pard,
And, like Nymph Echo, to a sound decay'd;—
Meanwhile the fays cluster'd the gracious Bard,
The darling centre of their dear regard:
Besides of sundry dances on the green,
Never was mortal man so brightly starr'd,
Or won such pretty homages, I ween.
"Nod to him, Elves!" cries the melodious queen.

CXX

"Nod to him, Elves, and flutter round about him,
And quite enclose him with your pretty crowd,
And touch him lovingly, for that, without him,
The silkworm now had spun our dreary shroud;—
But he hath all dispersed Death's tearful cloud,
And Time's dread effigy scared quite away:
Bow to him then, as though to me ye bow'd,
And his dear wishes prosper and obey
Wherever love and wit can find a way!

CXXI

"'Noint him with fairy dews of magic savours,
Shaken from orient buds still pearly wet,
Roses and spicy pinks,—and, of all favours,
Plant in his walks the purple violet,
And meadow-sweet under the hedges set,
To mingle breaths with dainty eglantine
And honeysuckles sweet,—nor yet forget
Some pastoral flowery chaplets to entwine,
To vie the thoughts about his brow benign!

CXXII

"Let no wild things astonish him or fear him,
But tell them all how mild he is of heart,
Till e'en the timid hares go frankly near him,
And eke the dappled does, yet never start;
Nor shall their fawns into the thickets dart,
Nor wrens forsake their nests among the leaves,
Nor speckled thrushes flutter far apart;—
But bid the sacred swallow haunt his eaves,
To guard his roof from lightning and from thieves.

CXXIII

"Or when he goes the nimble squirrel's visitor,
Let the brown hermit bring his hoarded nuts,
For, tell him, this is Nature's kind Inquisitor,—
Though man keeps cautious doors that conscience shuts,
For conscious wrong all curious quest rebuts,—
Nor yet shall bees uncase their jealous stings,
However he may watch their straw-built huts;—
So let him learn the crafts of all small things,
Which he will hint most aptly when he sings."

CXXIV

Here she leaves off, and with a graceful hand
Waves thrice three splendid circles round his head;
Which, though deserted by the radiant wand,
Wears still the glory which her waving shed,
Such as erst crown'd the old Apostle's head,
To show the thoughts there harbour'd were divine,
And on immortal contemplations fed:—
Goodly it was to see that glory shine
Around a brow so lofty and benign!—

CXXV

Goodly it was to see the elfin brood
Contend for kisses of his gentle hand,
That had their mortal enemy withstood,
And stay'd their lives, fast ebbing with the sand.
Long while this strife engaged the pretty band;
But now bold Chanticleer, from farm to farm,
Challenged the dawn creeping o'er eastern land,
And well the fairies knew that shrill alarm,
Which sounds the knell of every elfish charm.

CXXVI

And soon the rolling mist, that 'gan arise
From plashy mead and undiscover'd stream,
Earth's morning incense to the early skies,
Crept o'er the failing landscape of my dream.
Soon faded then the Phantom of my theme—
A shapeless shade, that fancy disavow'd,
And shrank to nothing in the mist extreme.
Then flew Titania,—and her little crowd,
Like flocking linnets, vanish'd in a cloud.

HERO AND LEANDER

TO S. T. COLERIDGE

It is not with a hope my feeble praise
Can add one moment's honour to thy own,
That with thy mighty name I grace these lays ;
I seek to glorify myself alone :
For that some precious favour thou hast shown
To my endeavour in a bygone time,
And by this token I would have it known
Thou art my friend, and friendly to my rhyme !
It is my dear ambition now to climb
Still higher in thy thought,—if my bold pen
May thrust on contemplations more sublime.—
But I am thirsty for thy praise, for when
We gain applauses from the great in name,
We seem to be partakers of *their* fame.

I

Oh Bards of old ! what sorrows have ye sung,
And tragic stories, chronicled in stone,—
Sad Philomel restored her ravish'd tongue,
And transform'd Niobe in dumbness shown ;
Sweet Sappho on her love for ever calls,
And Hero on the drown'd Leander falls !

II

Was it that spectacles of sadder plights
Should make our blisses relish the more high ?
Then all fair dames, and maidens, and true knights,
Whose flourish'd fortunes prosper in Love's eye,
Weep here, unto a tale of ancient grief,
Traced from the course of an old bas-relief.

III

There stands Abydos!—here is Sestos' steep,
Hard by the gusty margin of the sea,
Where sprinkling waves continually do leap;
And that is where those famous lovers be,
A builded gloom shot up into the grey,
As if the first tall watch-tow'r of the day.

IV

Lo! how the lark soars upward and is gone;
Turning a spirit as he nears the sky,
His voice is heard, though body there is none,
And rain-like music scatters from on high;
But Love would follow with a falcon spite,
To pluck the minstrel from his dewy height.

V

For Love hath framed a ditty of regrets,
Tuned to the hollow sobbings on the shore,
A vexing sense, that with like music frets,
And chimes this dismal burthen o'er and o'er,
Saying, Leander's joys are past and spent,
Like stars extinguish'd in the firmament.

VI

For ere the golden crevices of morn
Let in those regal luxuries of light,
Which all the variable east adorn,
And hang rich fringes on the skirts of night,
Leander, weaning from sweet Hero's side,
Must leave a widow where he found a bride.

VII

Hark! how the billows beat upon the sand!
Like pawing steeds impatient of delay;
Meanwhile their rider, ling'ring on the land,
Dallies with love, and holds farewell at bay
A too short span.—How tedious slow is grief!
But parting renders time both sad and brief.

VIII

"Alas!" (he sigh'd), "that this first glimpsing light,
Which makes the wide world tenderly appear,
Should be the burning signal for my flight
From all the world's best image, which is here;
Whose very shadow, in my fond compare,
Shines far more bright than Beauty's self elsewhere."

IX

Their cheeks are white as blossoms of the dark,
Whose leaves close up and show the outward pale,
And those fair mirrors where their joys did spark,
All dim and tarnish'd with a dreary veil,
No more to kindle till the night's return,
Like stars replenish'd at Joy's golden urn.

X

Ev'n thus they creep into the spectral grey,
That cramps the landscape in its narrow brim,
As when two shadows by old Lethe stray,
He clasping her, and she entwining him;
Like trees, wind-parted, that embrace anon,—
True love so often goes before 'tis gone.

XI

For what rich merchant but will pause in fear,
To trust his wealth to the unsafe abyss?
So Hero dotes upon her treasure here,
And sums the loss with many an anxious kiss,
Whilst her fond eyes grow dizzy in her head,
Fear aggravating fear with shows of dread.

XII

She thinks how many have been sunk and drown'd,
And spies their snow-white bones below the deep,
Then calls huge congregated monsters round,
And plants a rock wherever he would leap;
Anon she dwells on a fantastic dream,
Which she interprets of that fatal stream.

XIII

Saying, "That honied fly I saw was thee,
Which lighted on a water-lily's cup,
When, lo! the flower, enamour'd of my bee,
Closed on him suddenly and lock'd him up,
And he was smother'd in her drenching dew;
Therefore this day thy drowning I shall rue."

XIV

But next, remembering her virgin fame,
She clips him in her arms and bids him go,
But seeing him break loose, repents her shame,
And plucks him back upon her bosom's snow;
And tears unfix her iced resolve again,
As steadfast frosts are thaw'd by show'rs of rain.

XV

O for a type of parting!—Love to love
Is like the fond attraction of two spheres,
Which needs a godlike effort to remove,
And then sink down their sunny atmospheres,
In rain and darkness on each ruin'd heart,
Nor yet their melodies will sound apart.

XVI

So brave Leander sunders from his bride;
The wrenching pang disparts his soul in twain;
Half stays with her, half goes towards the tide,—
And life must ache, until they join again.
Now wouldst thou know the wideness of the wound?—
Mete every step he takes upon the ground.

XVII

And for the agony and bosom-throe,
Let it be measured by the wide vast air,
For that is infinite, and so is woe,
Since parted lovers breathe it everywhere.
Look how it heaves Leander's labouring chest,
Panting, at poise, upon a rocky crest!

XVIII

From which he leaps into the scooping brine,
That shocks his bosom with a double chill;
Because, all hours, till the slow sun's decline,
That cold divorcer will be 'twixt them still;
Wherefore he likens it to Styx' foul tide,
Where life grows death upon the other side.

XIX

Then sadly he confronts his twofold toil
Against rude waves and an unwilling mind,
Wishing, alas! with the stout rower's toil,
That like a rower he might gaze behind,
And watch that lonely statue he hath left,
On her bleak summit, weeping and bereft!

XX

Yet turning oft, he sees her troubled locks
Pursue him still the furthest that they may;
Her marble arms that overstretch the rocks,
And her pale passion'd hands that seem to pray
In dumb petition to the gods above:
Love prays devoutly when it prays for love!

XXI

Then with deep sighs he blows away the wave,
That hangs superfluous tears upon his cheek,
And bans his labour like a hopeless slave,
That, chain'd in hostile galley, faint and weak,
Plies on despairing through the restless foam,
Thoughtful of his lost love, and far-off home.

XXII

The drowsy mist before him chill and dank,
Like a dull lethargy o'erleans the sea,
When he rows on against the utter blank,
Steering as if to dim eternity,—
Like Love's frail ghost departing with the dawn;
A failing shadow in the twilight drawn.

XXIII

And soon is gone,—or nothing but a faint
And failing image in the eye of thought,
That mocks his model with an after-paint,
And stains an atom like the shape she sought;
Then with her earnest vows she hopes to fee
The old and hoary majesty of sea.

XXIV

"O King of waves, and brother of high Jove,
Preserve my sumless venture there afloat;
A woman's heart, and its whole wealth of love,
Are all embark'd upon that little boat;
Nay!—but two loves, two lives, a double fate,—
A perilous voyage for so dear a freight.

XXV

"If impious mariners be stain'd with crime,
Shake not in awful rage thy hoary locks;
Lay by thy storms until another time,
Lest my frail bark be dash'd against the rocks:
O rather smooth thy deeps, that he may fly
Like Love himself, upon a seeming sky!

XXVI

"Let all thy herded monsters sleep beneath,
Nor gore him with crook'd tusks, or wreathëd horns;
Let no fierce sharks destroy him with their teeth,
Nor spine-fish wound him with their venom'd thorns;
But if he faint, and timely succour lack,
Let ruthful dolphins rest him on their back.

XXVII

"Let no false dimpling whirlpools suck him in,
Nor slimy quicksands smother his sweet breath;
Let no jagg'd corals tear his tender skin,
Nor mountain billows bury him in death";—
And with that thought forestalling her own fears,
She drowned his painted image in her tears.

XXVIII

By this, the climbing Sun, with rest repair'd,
Look'd through the gold embrasures of the sky,
And ask'd the drowsy world how she had fared;—
The drowsy world shone brighten'd in reply;
And smiling off her fogs, his slanting beam
Spied young Leander in the middle stream.

XXIX

His face was pallid, but the hectic morn
Had hung a lying crimson on his cheeks,
And slanderous sparkles in his eyes forlorn;
So death lies ambush'd in consumptive streaks;
But inward grief was writhing o'er its task,
As heart-sick jesters weep behind the mask.

XXX

He thought of Hero and the lost delight,
Her last embracings, and the space between;
He thought of Hero and the future night,
Her speechless rapture and enamour'd mien,
When, lo! before him, scarce two galleys' space,
His thoughts confronted with another face!

XXXI

Her aspect's like a moon, divinely fair,
But makes the midnight darker that it lies on;
'Tis so beclouded with her coal-black hair
That densely skirts her luminous horizon,
Making her doubly fair, thus darkly set,
As marble lies advantaged upon jet.

XXXII

She's all too bright, too argent, and too pale,
To be a woman;—but a woman's double,
Reflected on the wave so faint and frail,
She tops the billows like an air-blown bubble;
Or dim creation of a morning dream,
Fair as the wave-bleach'd lily of the stream.

XXXIII

The very rumour strikes his seeing dead:
Great beauty like great fear first stuns the sense:
He knows not if her lips be blue or red,
Nor of her eyes can give true evidence:
Like murder's witness swooning in the court,
His sight falls senseless by its own report.

XXXIV

Anon resuming, it declares her eyes
Are tint with azure, like two crystal wells
That drink the blue complexion of the skies,
Or pearls outpeeping from their silvery shells:
Her polish'd brow, it is an ample plain,
To lodge vast contemplations of the main.

XXXV

Her lips might corals seem, but corals near
Stray through her hair like blossoms on a bower;
And o'er the weaker red still domineer,
And make it pale by tribute to more power;
Her rounded cheeks are of still paler hue,
Touch'd by the bloom of water, tender blue.

XXXVI

Thus he beholds her rocking on the water,
Under the glossy umbrage of her hair,
Like pearly Amphitrite's fairest daughter,
Naiad, or Nereid,—or Syren fair,
Mislodging music in her pitiless breast,
A nightingale within a falcon's nest.

XXXVII

They say there be such maidens in the deep,
Charming poor mariners, that all too near
By mortal lullabies fall dead asleep,
As drowsy men are poison'd through the ear;
Therefore Leander's fears begin to urge,
This snowy swan is come to sing his dirge.

XXXVIII

At which he falls into a deadly chill,
And strains his eyes upon her lips apart;
Fearing each breath to feel that prelude shrill,
Pierce through his marrow, like a breath-blown dart
Shot sudden from an Indian's hollow cane,
With mortal venom fraught, and fiery pain.

XXXIX

Here then, poor wretch, how he begins to crowd
A thousand thoughts within a pulse's space;
There seem'd so brief a pause of life allow'd,
His mind stretch'd universal, to embrace
The whole wide world, in an extreme farewell,—
A moment's musing—but an age to tell.

XL

For there stood Hero, widow'd at a glance,
The foreseen sum of many a tedious fact,
Pale cheeks, dim eyes, and wither'd countenance,
A wasted ruin that no wasting lack'd;
Time's tragic consequents ere time began,
A world of sorrow in a tear-drop's span.

XLI

A moment's thinking is an hour in words,—
An hour of words is little for some woes;
Too little breathing a long life affords
For love to paint itself by perfect shows;
Then let his love and grief unwrong'd lie dumb,
Whilst Fear, and that it fears, together come.

XLII

As when the crew, hard by some jutty cape,
Struck pale and panick'd by the billows' roar,
Lay by all timely measures of escape,
And let their bark go driving on the shore;
So fray'd Leander, drifting to his wreck,
Gazing on Scylla, falls upon her neck.

XLIII

For he hath all forgot the swimmer's art,
The rower's cunning, and the pilot's skill,
Letting his arms fall down in languid part,
Sway'd by the waves, and nothing by his will,
Till soon he jars against that glossy skin,
Solid like glass, though seemingly as thin.

XLIV

Lo! how she startles at the warning shock,
And straightway girds him to her radiant breast,
More like his safe smooth harbour than his rock;
Poor wretch, he is so faint and toil-opprest,
He cannot loose him from his grappling foe,
Whether for love or hate, she lets not go.

XLV

His eyes are blinded with the sleety brine,
His ears are deafen'd with the wildering noise;
He asks the purpose of her fell design,
But foamy waves choke up his struggling voice;
Under the ponderous sea his body dips,
And Hero's name dies bubbling on his lips.

XLVI

Look how a man is lower'd to his grave,—
A yearning hollow in the green earth's lap;
So he is sunk into the yawning wave,—
The plunging sea fills up the watery gap;
Anon he is all gone, and nothing seen
But likeness of green turf and hillocks green.

XLVII

And where he swam, the constant sun lies sleeping,
Over the verdant plain that makes his bed;
And all the noisy waves go freshly leaping,
Like gamesome boys over the churchyard dead;
The light in vain keeps looking for his face:—
Now screaming sea-fowl settle in his place.

XLVIII

Yet weep and watch for him, though all in vain!
Ye moaning billows, seek him as ye wander!
Ye gazing sunbeams, look for him again!
Ye winds, grow hoarse with asking for Leander!
Ye did but spare him for more cruel rape,
Sea-storm and ruin in a female shape!

XLIX

She says 'tis love hath bribed her to this deed,
The glancing of his eyes did so bewitch her.
O bootless theft! unprofitable meed!
Love's treasury is sack'd, but she no richer;
The sparkles of his eyes are cold and dead,
And all his golden looks are turn'd to lead!

L

She holds the casket, but her simple hand
Hath spill'd its dearest jewel by the way;
She hath life's empty garment at command,
But her own death lies covert in the prey;
As if a thief should steal a tainted vest,
Some dead man's spoil, and sicken of his pest.

LI

Now she compels him to her deeps below,
Hiding his face beneath her plenteous hair,
Which jealously she shakes all round her brow,
For dread of envy, though no eyes are there
But seals', and all brute tenants of the deep,
Which heedless through the wave their journeys keep.

LII

Down and still downward through the dusky green
She bore him, murmuring with joyous haste
In too rash ignorance, as he had been
Born to the texture of that watery waste;
That which she breathed and sigh'd, the emerald wave,
How could her pleasant home become his grave!

LIII

Down and still downward through the dusky green
She bore her treasure, with a face too nigh
To mark how life was alter'd in its mien,
Or how the light grew torpid in his eye,
Or how his pearly breath, unprison'd there,
Flew up to join the universal air.

LIV

She could not miss the throbbings of his heart,
Whilst her own pulse so wanton'd in its joy;
She could not guess he struggled to depart,
And when he strove no more, the hapless boy!
She read his mortal stillness for content,
Feeling no fear where only love was meant.

LV

Soon she alights upon her ocean-floor,
And straight unyokes her arms from her fair prize;
Then on his lovely face begins to pore,
As if to glut her soul;—her hungry eyes
Have grown so jealous of her arms' delight;
It seems she hath no other sense but sight.

LVI

But O sad marvel! O most bitter strange!
What dismal magic makes his cheek so pale?
Why will he not embrace,—why not exchange
Her kindly kisses;—wherefore not exhale
Some odorous message from life's ruby gates,
Where she his first sweet embassy awaits?

LVII

Her eyes, poor watchers, fix'd upon his looks,
Are grappled with a wonder near to grief,
As one, who pores on undecipher'd books,
Strains vain surmise, and dodges with belief;
So she keeps gazing with a mazy thought,
Framing a thousand doubts that end in nought.

LVIII

Too stern inscription for a page so young,
The dark translation of his look was death!
But death was written in an alien tongue,
And learning was not by to give it breath;
So one deep woe sleeps buried in its seal,
Which Time, untimely, hasteth to reveal.

LIX

Meanwhile she sits unconscious of her hap,
Nursing Death's marble effigy, which there
With heavy head lies pillow'd in her lap,
And elbows all unhinged;—his sleeking hair
Creeps o'er her knees, and settles where his hand
Leans with lax fingers crook'd against the sand;

LX

And there lies spread in many an oozy trail,
Like glossy weeds hung from a chalky base,
That shows no whiter than his brow is pale;
So soon the wintry death had bleach'd his face
Into cold marble,—with blue chilly shades,
Showing wherein the freezy blood pervades.

LXI

And o'er his steadfast cheek a furrow'd pain
Hath set, and stiffen'd like a storm in ice,
Showing by drooping lines the deadly strain
Of mortal anguish;—yet you might gaze twice
Ere Death it seem'd, and not his cousin, Sleep,
That through those creviced lids did underpeep.

LXII

But all that tender bloom about his eyes,
Is Death's own violets, which his utmost rite
It is to scatter when the red rose dies;
For blue is chilly, and akin to white:
Also he leaves some tinges on his lips,
Which he hath kiss'd with such cold frosty nips.

LXIII

"Surely," quoth she, "he sleeps, the senseless thing,
Oppress'd and faint with toiling in the stream!"
Therefore she will not mar his rest, but sing
So low, her tune shall mingle with his dream;
Meanwhile, her lily fingers task to twine
His uncrispt locks uncurling in the brine.

LXIV

"O lovely boy!"—thus she attuned her voice,—
"Welcome, thrice welcome, to a sea-maid's home,
My love-mate thou shalt be, and true heart's choice;
How have I long'd such a twin-self should come,—
A lonely thing, till this sweet chance befel,
My heart kept sighing like a hollow shell.

LXV

"Here thou shalt live, beneath this secret dome,
An ocean-bow'r, defended by the shade
Of quiet waters, a cool emerald gloom
To lap thee all about. Nay, be not fray'd,
Those are but shady fishes that sail by
Like antic clouds across my liquid sky!

LXVI

"Look how the sunbeam burns upon their scales,
And shows rich glimpses of their Tyrian skins;
They flash small lightnings from their vigorous tails,
And winking stars are kindled at their fins;
These shall divert thee in thy weariest mood,
And seek thy hand for gamesomeness and food.

LXVII

"Lo! those green pretty leaves with tassel bells,
My flow'rets those, that never pine for drouth;
Myself did plant them in the dappled shells,
That drink the wave with such a rosy mouth,—
Pearls wouldst thou have beside? crystals to shine?
I had such treasures once,—now they are thine.

LXVIII

"Now, lay thine ear against this golden sand,
And thou shalt hear the music of the sea,
Those hollow tunes it plays against the land,—
Is't not a rich and wondrous melody?
I have lain hours, and fancied in its tone
I heard the languages of ages gone!

LXIX

"I too can sing when it shall please thy choice,
And breathe soft tunes through a melodious shell,
Though heretofore I have but set my voice
To some long sighs, grief-harmonised, to tell
How desolate I fared;—but this sweet change
Will add new notes of gladness to my range!

LXX

"Or bid me speak, and I will tell thee tales,
Which I have framed out of the noise of waves;
Ere now I have communed with senseless gales,
And held vain colloquies with barren caves;
But I could talk to thee whole days and days,
Only to word my love a thousand ways.

LXXI

"But if thy lips will bless me with their speech,
Then ope, sweet oracles! and I'll be mute;
I was born ignorant for thee to teach,
Nay all love's lore to thy dear looks impute;
Then ope thine eyes, fair teachers, by whose light
I saw to give away my heart aright!"

LXXII

But cold and deaf the sullen creature lies
Over her knees, and with concealing clay,
Like hoarding Avarice, locks up his eyes,
And leaves her world impoverish'd of day;
Then at his cruel lips she bends to plead,
But there the door is closed against her need.

LXXIII

Surely he sleeps,—so her false wits infer!
Alas! poor sluggard, ne'er to wake again!
Surely he sleeps, yet without any stir
That might denote a vision in his brain;
Or if he does not sleep, he feigns too long,
Twice she hath reach'd the ending of her song.

LXXIV

Therefore 'tis time she tells him to uncover
Those radiant jesters, and disperse her fears,
Whereby her April face is shaded over,
Like rainy clouds just ripe for showering tears;
Nay, if he will not wake, so poor she gets,
Herself must rob those lock'd-up cabinets.

LXXV

With that she stoops above his brow, and bids
Her busy hands forsake his tangled hair,
And tenderly lift up those coffer-lids,
That she may gaze upon the jewels there,
Like babes that pluck an early bud apart,
To know the dainty colour of its heart.

LXXVI

Now, picture one, soft creeping to a bed,
Who slowly parts the fringe-hung canopies,
And then starts back to find the sleeper dead;
So she looks in on his uncover'd eyes,
And seeing all within so drear and dark,
Her own bright soul dies in her like a spark.

LXXVII

Backward she falls, like a pale prophetess,
Under the swoon of holy divination:
And what had all surpass'd her simple guess,
She now resolves in this dark revelation;
Death's very mystery,—oblivious death;—
Long sleep,—deep night, and an trancëd breath.

LXXVIII

Yet life, though wounded sore, not wholly slain,
Merely obscured, and not extinguish'd, lies;
Her breath that stood at ebb, soon flows again,
Heaving her hollow breast with heavy sighs,
And light comes in and kindles up the gloom,
To light her spirit from its transient tomb.

LXXIX

Then like the sun, awaken'd at new dawn,
With pale bewilder'd face she peers about,
And spies blurr'd images obscurely drawn,
Uncertain shadows in a haze of doubt;
But her true grief grows shapely by degrees,—
A perish'd creature lying on her knees.

LXXX

And now she knows how that old Murther preys,
Whose quarry on her lap lies newly slain:
How he roams all abroad and grimly slays,
Like a lean tiger in Love's own domain;
Parting fond mates,—and oft in flowery lawns
Bereaves mild mothers of their milky fawns.

LXXXI

O too dear knowledge! O pernicious earning!
Foul curse engraven upon beauty's page!
Ev'n now the sorrow of that deadly learning
Ploughs up her brow, like an untimely age,
And on her cheek stamps verdict of death's truth
By canker blights upon the bud of youth!

LXXXII

For as unwholesome winds decay the leaf,
So her cheeks' rose is perish'd by her sighs,
And withers in the sickly breath of grief;
Whilst unacquainted rheum bedims her eyes,
Tears, virgin tears, the first that ever leapt
From those young lids, now plentifully wept.

LXXXIII

Whence being shed, the liquid crystalline
Drops straightway down, refusing to partake
In gross admixture with the baser brine,
But shrinks and hardens into pearls opaque,
Hereafter to be worn on arms and ears;
So one maid's trophy is another's tears!

LXXXIV

"O foul Arch-Shadow, thou old cloud of Night,"
(Thus in her frenzy she began to wail,)
"Thou blank Oblivion—blotter-out of light,
Life's ruthless murderer, and dear love's bale!
Why hast thou left thy havoc incomplete,
Leaving me here, and slaying the more sweet?

LXXXV

"Lo! what a lovely ruin thou hast made!
Alas! alas! thou hast no eye to see,
And blindly slew'st him in misguided shade.
Would I had lent my doting sense to thee!
But now I turn to thee, a willing mark,
Thine arrows miss me in the aimless dark!

LXXXVI

"O doubly cruel!—twice misdoing spite,
But I will guide thee with my helping eyes,
Or—walk the wide world through, devoid of sight,—
Yet thou shalt know me by my many sighs.
Nay, then thou should'st have spared my rose, false Death,
And known Love's flow'r by smelling his sweet breath;

LXXXVII

"Or, when thy furious rage was round him dealing,
Love should have grown from touching of his skin;
But like cold marble thou art all unfeeling,
And hast no ruddy springs of warmth within,
And being but a shape of freezing bone,
Thy touching only turn'd my love to stone!

LXXXVIII

"And here, alas! he lies across my knees,
With cheeks still colder than the stilly wave.
The light beneath his eyelids seems to freeze;
Here then, since Love is dead and lacks a grave,
O come and dig it in my sad heart's core—
That wound will bring a balsam for its sore!

LXXXIX

"For art thou not a sleep where sense of ill
Lies stingless, like a sense benumb'd with cold,
Healing all hurts only with sleep's good-will?
So shall I slumber, and perchance behold
My living love in dreams,—O happy night,
That lets me company his banish'd spright!

XC

"O poppy Death!—sweet poisoner of sleep;
Where shall I seek for thee, oblivious drug,
That I may steep thee in my drink, and creep
Out of life's coil? Look, Idol! how I hug
Thy dainty image in this strict embrace,
And kiss this clay-cold model of thy face!

XCI

"Put out, put out these sun-consuming lamps,
I do but read my sorrows by their shine;
O come and quench them with thy oozy damps,
And let my darkness intermix with thine;
Since love is blinded, wherefore should I see?
Now love is death,—death will be love to me!

XCII

"Away, away, this vain complaining breath,
It does but stir the troubles that I weep;
Let it be hush'd and quieted, sweet Death;
The wind must settle ere the wave can sleep,—
Since love is silent, I would fain be mute;
O Death, be gracious to my dying suit!"

XCIII

Thus far she pleads, but pleading nought avails her,
For Death, her sullen burthen, deigns no heed;
Then with dumb craving arms, since darkness fails her,
She prays to heaven's fair light, as if her need
Inspired her there were Gods to pity pain,
Or end it,—but she lifts her arms in vain!

XCIV

Poor gilded Grief! the subtle light by this
With mazy gold creeps through her watery mine,
And, diving downward through the green abyss,
Lights up her palace with an amber shine;
There, falling on her arms,—the crystal skin
Reveals the ruby tide that fares within.

XCV

Look how the fulsome beam would hang a glory
On her dark hair, but the dark hairs repel it;
Look how the perjured glow suborns a story
On her pale lips, but lips refuse to tell it;
Grief will not swerve from grief, however told
On coral lips, or character'd in gold;

XCVI

Or else, thou maid! safe anchor'd on Love's neck,
Listing the hapless doom of young Leander,
Thou would'st not shed a tear for that old wreck,
Sitting secure where no wild surges wander;
Whereas the woe moves on with tragic pace,
And shows its sad reflection in thy face.

XCVII

Thus having travell'd on, and track'd the tale,
Like the due course of an old bas-relief,
Where Tragedy pursues her progress pale,
Brood here awhile upon that sea-maid's grief,
And take a deeper imprint from the frieze
Of that young Fate, with Death upon her knees.

XCVIII

Then whilst the melancholy Muse withal
Resumes her music in a sadder tone,
Meanwhile the sunbeam strikes upon the wall,
Conceive that lovely siren to live on,
Ev'n as Hope whisper'd, the Promethean light
Would kindle up the dead Leander's spright.

XCIX

"'Tis light," she says, "that feeds the glittering stars,
And those were stars set in his heavenly brow;
But this salt cloud, this cold sea-vapour, mars
Their radiant breathing, and obscures them now;
Therefore I'll lay him in the clear blue air,
And see how these dull orbs will kindle there."

C

Swiftly as dolphins glide, or swifter yet,
With dead Leander in her fond arms' fold,
She cleaves the meshes of that radiant net
The sun hath twined above of liquid gold,
Nor slacks till on the margin of the land
She lays his body on the glowing sand.

CI

There, like a pearly waif, just past the reach
Of foamy billows he lies cast. Just then,
Some listless fishers, straying down the beach,
Spy out this wonder. Thence the curious men,
Low crouching, creep into a thicket brake,
And watch her doings till their rude hearts ache.

CII

First she begins to chafe him till she faints,
Then falls upon his mouth with kisses many,
And sometimes pauses in her own complaints
To list his breathing, but there is not any,—
Then looks into his eyes where no light dwells;
Light makes no pictures in such muddy wells.

CIII

The hot sun parches his discover'd eyes,
The hot sun beats on his discolour'd limbs,
The sand is oozy whereupon he lies,
Soiling his fairness ;—then away she swims,
Meaning to gather him a daintier bed,
Plucking the cool fresh weeds, brown, green, and red.

CIV

But, simple-witted thief, while she dives under,
Another robs her of her amorous theft ;
The ambush'd fishermen creep forth to plunder,
And steal the unwatch'd treasure she has left ;
Only his void impression dints the sands ;
Leander is purloin'd by stealthy hands !

CV

Lo ! how she shudders off the beaded wave,
Like Grief all over tears, and senseless falls,—
His void imprint seems hollow'd for her grave ;
Then, rising on her knees, looks round and calls
On "Hero ! Hero !" having learn'd this name
Of his last breath, she calls him by the same.

CVI

Then with her frantic hands she rends her hairs,
And casts them forth, sad keepsakes to the wind,
As if in plucking those she pluck'd her cares ;
But grief lies deeper, and remains behind
Like a barb'd arrow, rankling in her brain,
Turning her very thoughts to throbs of pain.

CVII

Anon her tangled locks are left alone,
And down upon the sand she meekly sits,
Hard by the foam, as humble as a stone,
Like an enchanted maid beside her wits,
That ponders with a look serene and tragic,
Stunn'd by the mighty mystery of magic.

CVIII

Or think of Ariadne's utter trance,
Crazed by the flight of that disloyal traitor,
Who left her gazing on the green expanse
That swallow'd up his track,—yet this would mate her,
Ev'n in the cloudy summit of her woe,
When o'er the far sea-brim she saw him go.

CIX

For even so she bows, and bends her gaze
O'er the eternal waste, as if to sum
Its waves by weary thousands all her days,
Dismally doom'd! meanwhile the billows come,
And coldly dabble with her quiet feet,
Like any bleaching stones they wont to greet.

CX

And thence into her lap have boldly sprung,
Washing her weedy tresses to and fro,
That round her crouching knees have darkly hung;
But she sits careless of waves' ebb and flow,
Like a lone beacon on a desert coast,
Showing where all her hope was wreck'd and lost.

CXI

Yet whether in the sea or vaulted sky,
She knoweth not her love's abrupt resort,
So like a shape of dreams he left her eye,
Winking with doubt. Meanwhile, the churls' report
Has throng'd the beach with many a curious face,
That peeps upon her from its hiding place.

CXII

And here a head, and there a brow half seen,
Dodges behind a rock. Here on his hands
A mariner his crumpled cheeks doth lean
Over a rugged crest. Another stands,
Holding his harmful arrow at the head,
Still check'd by human caution and strange dread.

CXIII

One stops his ears,—another close beholder
Whispers unto the next his grave surmise;
This crouches down,—and just above his shoulder,
A woman's pity saddens in her eyes,
And prompts her to befriend that lonely grief,
With all sweet helps of sisterly relief.

CXIV

And down the sunny beach she paces slowly,
With many doubtful pauses by the way;
Grief hath an influence so hush'd and holy,—
Making her twice attempt, ere she can lay
Her hand upon that sea-maid's shoulder white,
Which makes her startle up in wild affright.

CXV

And, like a seal, she leaps into the wave
That drowns the shrill remainder of her scream;
Anon the sea fills up the watery cave,
And seals her exit with a foamy seam,—
Leaving those baffled gazers on the beach,
Turning in uncouth wonder each to each.

CXVI

Some watch, some call, some see her head emerge,
Wherever a brown weed falls through the foam;
Some point to white eruptions of the surge:—
But she is vanish'd to her shady home,
Under the deep, inscrutable,—and there
Weeps in a midnight made of her own hair.

CXVII

Now here, the sighing winds, before unheard,
Forth from their cloudy caves begin to blow,
Till all the surface of the deep is stirr'd,
Like to the panting grief it hides below;
And heaven is cover'd with a stormy rack,
Soiling the waters with its inky black.

CXVIII

The screaming fowl resigns her finny prey,
And labours shoreward with a bending wing,
Rowing against the wind her toilsome way;
Meanwhile, the curling billows chafe, and fling
Their dewy frost still further on the stones,
That answer to the wind with hollow groans.

CXIX

And here and there a fisher's far-off bark
Flies with the sun's last glimpse upon its sail,
Like a bright flame amid the waters dark,
Watch'd with the hope and fear of maidens pale;
And anxious mothers that upturn their brows,
Freighting the gusty wind with frequent vows,

CXX

For that the horrid deep has no sure path
To guide Love safe into his homely haven.
And lo! the storm grows blacker in its wrath,
O'er the dark billow brooding like a raven,
That bodes of death and widow's sorrowing,
Under the dusky covert of his wing.

CXXI

And so day ended. But no vesper spark
Hung forth its heavenly sign; but sheets of flame
Play'd round the savage features of the dark,
Making night horrible. That night, there came
A weeping maiden to high Sestos' steep,
And tore her hair and gazed upon the deep.

CXXII

And waved aloft her bright and ruddy torch,
Whose flame the boastful wind so rudely fann'd,
That oft it would recoil, and basely scorch
The tender covert of her sheltering hand;
Which yet, for Love's dear sake, disdain'd retire,
And, like a glorying martyr, braved the fire.

CXXIII

For that was love's own sign and beacon guide
Across the Hellespont's wide weary space,
Wherein he nightly struggled with the tide:—
Look what a red it forges on her face,
As if she blush'd at holding such a light,
Ev'n in the unseen presence of the night!

CXXIV

Whereas her tragic cheek is truly pale,
And colder than the rude and ruffian air
That howls into her ear a horrid tale
Of storm and wreck, and uttermost despair,
Saying, "Leander floats amid the surge,
And those are dismal waves that sing his dirge."

CXXV

And hark!—a grieving voice, trembling and faint,
Blends with the hollow sobbings of the sea;
Like the sad music of a siren's plaint,
But shriller than Leander's voice should be,
Unless the wintry death had changed its tone,—
Wherefore she thinks she hears his spirit moan.

CXXVI

For now, upon each brief and breathless pause,
Made by the raging winds, it plainly calls
On "Hero! Hero!"—whereupon she draws
Close to the dizzy brink, that ne'er appals
Her brave and constant spirit to recoil,
However the wild billows toss and toil.

CXXVII

"Oh! dost thou live under the deep deep sea?
I thought such love as thine could never die;
If thou hast gain'd an immortality
From the kind pitying sea-god, so will I;
And this false cruel tide that used to sever
Our hearts, shall be our common home for ever!

CXXVIII

"There we will sit and sport upon one billow,
And sing our ocean ditties all the day,
And lie together on the same green pillow,
That curls above us with its dewy spray;
And ever in one presence live and dwell,
Like two twin pearls within the selfsame shell."

CXXIX

One moment then, upon the dizzy verge
She stands;—with face upturn'd against the sky;
A moment more, upon the foamy surge
She gazes, with a calm despairing eye;
Feeling that awful pause of blood and breath,
Which life endures when it confronts with death;—

CXXX

Then from the giddy steep she madly springs,
Grasping her maiden robes, that vainly kept
Panting abroad, like unavailing wings,
To save her from her death.—The sea-maid wept
And in a crystal cave her corse enshrined;
No meaner sepulchre should Hero find!

BALLAD

Spring it is cheery,
Winter is dreary,
Green leaves hang, but the brown must fly;
When he's forsaken,
Wither'd and shaken,
What can an old man do but die?

Love will not clip him,
Maids will not lip him,
Maud and Marian pass him by;
Youth it is sunny,
Age has no honey,—
What can an old man do but die?

June it was jolly,
Oh for its folly!
A dancing leg and a laughing eye;
Youth may be silly,
Wisdom is chilly,—
What can an old man do but die?

Friends, they are scanty,
Beggars are plenty,
If he has followers, I know why;
Gold's in his clutches,
(Buying him crutches!)
What can an old man do but die?

AUTUMN

The Autumn skies are flush'd with gold,
And fair and bright the rivers run;
These are but streams of winter cold,
And painted mists that quench the sun.

In secret boughs no sweet birds sing,
In secret boughs no bird can shroud;
These are but leaves that take to wing,
And wintry winds that pipe so loud.

'Tis not trees' shade, but cloudy glooms
That on the cheerless valleys fall,
The flowers are in their grassy tombs,
And tears of dew are on them all.

BALLAD

Sigh on, sad heart, for Love's eclipse
  And Beauty's fairest queen,
Though 'tis not for my peasant lips
  To soil her name between:
A king might lay his sceptre down,
  But I am poor and nought,
The brow should wear a golden crown
  That wears her in its thought.

The diamonds glancing in her hair,
  Whose sudden beams surprise,
Might bid such humble hopes beware
  The glancing of her eyes;
Yet looking once, I look'd too long,
  And if my love is sin,
Death follows on the heels of wrong,
  And kills the crime within.

Her dress seem'd wove of lily leaves,
  It was so pure and fine,—
O lofty wears, and lowly weaves,—
  But hodden-grey is mine;
And homely hose must step apart,
  Where garter'd princes stand,
But may he wear my love at heart
  That wins her lily hand!

Alas! there's far from russet frieze
  To silks and satin gowns,
But I doubt if God made like degrees
  In courtly hearts and clowns.
My father wrong'd a maiden's mirth,
  And brought her cheeks to blame,
And all that's lordly of my birth
  Is my reproach and shame!

'Tis vain to weep,—'tis vain to sigh,
  'Tis vain, this idle speech,
For where her happy pearls do lie,
  My tears may never reach;
Yet when I'm gone, e'en lofty pride
  May say, of what has been,
His love was nobly born and died,
  Though all the rest was mean!

My speech is rude,—but speech is weak
  Such love as mine to tell,
Yet had I words, I dare not speak,
  So, Lady, fare thee well;
I will not wish thy better state
  Was one of low degree,
But I must weep that partial fate
  Made such a churl of me.

THE EXILE

THE swallow with summer
Will wing o'er the seas,
The wind that I sigh to
Will visit thy trees.
The ship that it hastens
Thy ports will contain,
But me!—I must never
See England again!

There's many that weep there,
But one weeps alone,
For the tears that are falling
So far from her own;
So far from thy own, love,
We know not our pain;
If death is between us,
Or only the main.

When the white cloud reclines
On the verge of the sea,
I fancy the white cliffs,
And dream upon thee;
But the cloud spreads its wings
To the blue heav'n and flies.
We never shall meet, love,
Except in the skies!

TO ———

Welcome, dear Heart, and a most kind good-morrow;
The day is gloomy, but our looks shall shine:—
Flowers I have none to give thee, but I borrow
Their sweetness in a verse to speak for thine.

Here are red roses, gather'd at thy cheeks,—
The white were all too happy to look white:
For love the rose, for faith the lily speaks;
It withers in false hands, but here 'tis bright!

Dost love sweet Hyacinth? Its scented leaf
Curls manifold,—all love's delights blow double:
'Tis said this flow'ret is inscribed with grief,—
But let that hint of a forgotten trouble.

I pluck'd the Primrose at night's dewy noon;
Like Hope, it show'd its blossoms in the night;—
'Twas, like Endymion, watching for the Moon!
And here are Sun-flowers, amorous of light!

These golden Buttercups are April's seal,—
The Daisy-stars her constellations be:
These grew so lowly, I was forced to kneel,
Therefore I pluck no Daisies but for thee!

Here's Daisies for the morn, Primrose for gloom,
Pansies and Roses for the noontide hours:—
A wight once made a dial of their bloom,—
So may thy life be measured out by flowers!

ODE TO MELANCHOLY

COME, let us set our careful breasts,
Like Philomel, against the thorn,
To aggravate the inward grief,
That makes her accents so forlorn;
The world has many cruel points,
Whereby our bosoms have been torn,
And there are dainty themes of grief,
In sadness to outlast the morn,—
True honour's dearth, affection's death,
Neglectful pride, and cankering scorn,
With all the piteous tales that tears
Have water'd since the world was born.

The world!—it is a wilderness,
Where tears are hung on every tree;
For thus my gloomy phantasy
Makes all things weep with me!
Come let us sit and watch the sky,
And fancy clouds, where no clouds be;
Grief is enough to blot the eye,
And make heaven black with misery.
Why should birds sing such merry notes,
Unless they were more blest than we?
No sorrow ever chokes their throats,
Except sweet nightingale; for she
Was born to pain our hearts the more
With her sad melody.
Why shines the Sun, except that he
Makes gloomy nooks for Grief to hide,
And pensive shades for Melancholy,
When all the earth is bright beside?

Let clay wear smiles, and green grass wave,
Mirth shall not win us back again,
Whilst man is made of his own grave,
And fairest clouds but gilded rain!

I saw my mother in her shroud,
Her cheek was cold and very pale;
And ever since I've look'd on all
As creatures doom'd to fail!
Why do buds ope except to die?
Ay, let us watch the roses wither,
And think of our loves' cheeks;
And oh! how quickly time doth fly
To bring death's winter hither!
Minutes, hours, days, and weeks,
Months, years, and ages, shrink to nought;
An age past is but a thought!

Ay, let us think of Him awhile
That, with a coffin for a boat,
Rows daily o'er the Stygian moat,
And for our table choose a tomb:
There's dark enough in any skull
To charge with black a raven plume;
And for the saddest funeral thoughts
A winding-sheet hath ample room,
Where Death, with his keen-pointed style,
Hath writ the common doom.
How wide the yew-tree spreads its gloom,
And o'er the dead lets fall its dew,
As if in tears it wept for them,
The many human families
That sleep around its stem!

How cold the dead have made these stones,
With natural drops kept ever wet!
Lo! here the best—the worst—the world
Doth now remember or forget,

Are in one common ruin hurl'd,
And love and hate are calmly met;
The loveliest eyes that ever shone,
The fairest hands, and locks of jet.
Is't not enough to vex our souls,
And fill our eyes, that we have set
Our love upon a rose's leaf,
Our hearts upon a violet?
Blue eyes, red cheeks, are frailer yet;
And sometimes at their swift decay
Beforehand we must fret.
The roses bud and bloom again;
But Love may haunt the grave of Love,
And watch the mould in vain.

O clasp me, sweet, whilst thou art mine,
And do not take my tears amiss;
For tears must flow to wash away
A thought that shows so stern as this:
Forgive, if somewhile I forget,
In woe to come, the present bliss;
As frighted Proserpine let fall
Her flowers at the sight of Dis,
Ev'n so the dark and bright will kiss.
The sunniest things throw sternest shade,
And there is ev'n a happiness
That makes the heart afraid!

Now let us with a spell invoke
The full-orb'd moon to grieve our eyes;
Not bright, not bright, but, with a cloud
Lapp'd all about her, let her rise
All pale and dim, as if from rest
The ghost of the late-buried sun
Had crept into the skies.
The Moon! she is the source of sighs,
The very face to make us sad;
If but to think in other times

The same calm quiet look she had,
As if the world held nothing base,
Of vile and mean, of fierce and bad;
The same fair light that shone in streams,
The fairy lamp that charm'd the lad;
For so it is, with spent delights
She taunts men's brains, and makes them mad.

All things are touch'd with Melancholy,
Born of the secret soul's mistrust,
To feel her fair ethereal wings
Weigh'd down with vile degraded dust;
Even the bright extremes of joy
Bring on conclusions of disgust,
Like the sweet blossoms of the May,
Whose fragrance ends in must.
O give her, then, her tribute just,
Her sighs and tears, and musings holy;
There is no music in the life
That sounds with idiot laughter solely;
There's not a string attuned to mirth,
But has its chord in Melancholy.

SONNET

By ev'ry sweet tradition of true hearts,
Graven by Time, in love with his own lore;
By all old martyrdoms and antique smarts,
Wherein Love died to be alive the more;
Yea, by the sad impression on the shore,
Left by the drown'd Leander, to endear
That coast for ever, where the billow's roar
Moaneth for pity in the Poet's ear;
By Hero's faith, and the foreboding tear
That quench'd her brand's last twinkle in its fall;
By Sappho's leap, and the low rustling fear
That sigh'd around her flight; I swear by all,
The world shall find such pattern in my act,
As if Love's great examples still were lack'd.

SONNET

TO MY WIFE

The curse of Adam, the old curse of all,
Though I inherit in this feverish life
Of worldly toil, vain wishes, and hard strife,
And fruitless thought, in Care's eternal thrall,
Yet more sweet honey than of bitter gall
I taste, through thee, my Eva, my sweet wife.
Then what was Man's lost Paradise!—how rife
Of bliss, since love is with him in his fall!
Such as our own pure passion still might frame,
Of this fair earth, and its delightful bow'rs,
If no fell sorrow, like the serpent, came
To trail its venom o'er the sweetest flow'rs;—
But oh! as many and such tears are ours,
As only should be shed for guilt and shame!

SONNET

ON RECEIVING A GIFT

Look how the golden ocean shines above
Its pebbly stones, and magnifies their girth;
So does the bright and blessed light of Love
Its own things glorify, and raise their worth.
As weeds seem flowers beneath the flattering brine,
And stones like gems, and gems as gems indeed,
Ev'n so our tokens shine; nay, they outshine
Pebbles and pearls, and gems and coral weed;
For where be ocean waves but half so clear,
So calmly constant, and so kindly warm,
As Love's most mild and glowing atmosphere,
That hath no dregs to be upturn'd by storm?
Thus, sweet, thy gracious gifts are gifts of price,
And more than gold to doting Avarice.

SONNET

Love, dearest Lady, such as I would speak,
Lives not within the humour of the eye;—
Not being but an outward phantasy,
That skims the surface of a tinted cheek,—
Else it would wane with beauty, and grow weak,
As if the rose made summer,—and so lie
Amongst the perishable things that die,
Unlike the love which I would give and seek:
Whose health is of no hue—to feel decay
With cheeks' decay, that have a rosy prime.
Love is its own great loveliness alway,
And takes new lustre from the touch of time;
Its bough owns no December and no May,
But bears its blossom into Winter's clime.

THE DREAM OF EUGENE ARAM

I

'Twas in the prime of summer time,
An evening calm and cool,
And four-and-twenty happy boys
Came bounding out of school:
There were some that ran and some that leapt,
Like troutlets in a pool.

II

Away they sped with gamesome minds,
And souls untouch'd by sin;
To a level mead they came, and there
They drave the wickets in:
Pleasantly shone the setting sun
Over the town of Lynn.

III

Like sportive deer they coursed about,
And shouted as they ran,—
Turning to mirth all things of earth,
As only boyhood can;
But the Usher sat remote from all,
A melancholy man!

IV

His hat was off, his vest apart,
To catch heaven's blessed breeze;
For a burning thought was in his brow,
And his bosom ill at ease:
So he lean'd his head on his hands, and read
The book between his knees!

V

Leaf after leaf he turn'd it o'er,
Nor ever glanced aside,
For the peace of his soul he read that book
In the golden eventide:
Much study had made him very lean,
And pale, and leaden-eyed.

VI

At last he shut the ponderous tome,
With a fast and fervent grasp
He strain'd the dusky covers close,
And fix'd the brazen hasp:
"Oh, God! could I so close my mind,
And clasp it with a clasp!"

VII

Then leaping on his feet upright,
Some moody turns he took,—
Now up the mead, then down the mead,
And past a shady nook,—
And, lo! he saw a little boy
That pored upon a book!

VIII

"My gentle lad, what is't you read—
Romance or fairy fable?
Or is it some historic page,
Of kings and crowns unstable?"
The young boy gave an upward glance,—
"It is 'The Death of Abel.'"

IX

The Usher took six hasty strides,
As smit with sudden pain,—
Six hasty strides beyond the place,
Then slowly back again;
And down he sat beside the lad,
And talk'd with him of Cain;

X

And, long since then, of bloody men,
Whose deeds tradition saves;
Of lonely folk cut off unseen,
And hid in sudden graves;
Of horrid stabs, in groves forlorn,
And murders done in caves;

XI

And how the sprites of injured men
Shriek upward from the sod,—
Ay, how the ghostly hand will point
To show the burial clod;
And unknown facts of guilty acts
Are seen in dreams from God!

XII

He told how murderers walk the earth
Beneath the curse of Cain,—
With crimson clouds before their eyes,
And flames about their brain:
For blood has left upon their souls
Its everlasting stain!

XIII

"And well," quoth he, "I know, for truth,
Their pangs must be extreme,—
Woe, woe, unutterable woe,—
Who spill life's sacred stream!
For why? Methought, last night, I wrought
A murder, in a dream!

XIV

"One that had never done me wrong—
A feeble man, and old;
I led him to a lonely field,—
The moon shone clear and cold:
Now here, said I, this man shall die,
And I will have his gold!

XV

"Two sudden blows with a ragged stick,
And one with a heavy stone,
One hurried gash with a hasty knife,—
And then the deed was done:
There was nothing lying at my foot
But lifeless flesh and bone!

XVI

"Nothing but lifeless flesh and bone,
That could not do me ill;
And yet I fear'd him all the more,
For lying there so still:
There was a manhood in his look,
That murder could not kill!

XVII

"And, lo! the universal air
Seem'd lit with ghastly flame;—
Ten thousand thousand dreadful eyes
Were looking down in blame:
I took the dead man by his hand,
And call'd upon his name!

XVIII

"Oh, God! it made me quake to see
Such sense within the slain!
But when I touch'd the lifeless clay,
The blood gush'd out amain!
For every clot, a burning spot
Was scorching in my brain!

XIX

"My head was like an ardent coal,
My heart as solid ice;
My wretched, wretched soul, I knew,
Was at the Devil's price:
A dozen times I groan'd; the dead
Had never groan'd but twice!

XX

"And now, from forth the frowning sky,
From the Heaven's topmost height,
I heard a voice—the awful voice
Of the blood-avenging Sprite:—
'Thou guilty man! take up thy dead
And hide it from my sight!'

XXI

"I took the dreary body up,
And cast it in a stream,—
A sluggish water, black as ink,
The depth was so extreme:—
My gentle Boy, remember this
Is nothing but a dream!

XXII

"Down went the corse with a hollow plunge,
And vanish'd in the pool;
Anon I cleansed my bloody hands,
And wash'd my forehead cool,
And sat among the urchins young,
That evening in the school.

XXIII

"Oh, Heaven! to think of their white souls,
And mine so black and grim!
I could not share in childish prayer,
Nor join in Evening Hymn:
Like a Devil of the Pit I seem'd,
'Mid holy Cherubim!

XXIV

"And peace went with them, one and all,
And each calm pillow spread;
But Guilt was my grim Chamberlain
That lighted me to bed;
And drew my midnight curtains round,
With fingers bloody red!

XXV

"All night I lay in agony,
In anguish dark and deep;
My fever'd eyes I dared not close,
But stared aghast at Sleep:
For Sin had render'd unto her
The keys of Hell to keep!

XXVI

"All night I lay in agony,
From weary chime to chime,
With one besetting horrid hint,
That rack'd me all the time;
A mighty yearning, like the first
Fierce impulse unto crime!

XXVII

"One stern tyrannic thought, that made
All other thoughts its slave;
Stronger and stronger every pulse
Did that temptation crave,—
Still urging me to go and see
The Dead Man in his grave!

XXVIII

"Heavily I rose up, as soon
As light was in the sky,
And sought the black accursed pool
With a wild misgiving eye;
And I saw the Dead in the river bed,
For the faithless stream was dry.

XXIX

"Merrily rose the lark, and shook
The dew-drop from its wing;
But I never mark'd its morning flight,
I never heard it sing:
For I was stooping once again
Under the horrid thing.

XXX

"With breathless speed, like a soul in chase,
I took him up and ran;—
There was no time to dig a grave
Before the day began:
In a lonesome wood, with heaps of leaves,
I hid the murder'd man!

XXXI

"And all that day I read in school,
But my thought was other where;
As soon as the mid-day task was done,
In secret I was there:
And a mighty wind had swept the leaves,
And still the corse was bare!

XXXII

"Then down I cast me on my face,
And first began to weep,
For I knew my secret then was one
That earth refused to keep:
Or land or sea, though he should be
Ten thousand fathoms deep.

XXXIII

"So wills the fierce avenging Sprite,
Till blood for blood atones!
Ay, though he's buried in a cave,
And trodden down with stones,
And years have rotted off his flesh,—
The world shall see his bones!

XXXIV

"Oh, God! that horrid, horrid dream
Besets me now awake!
Again—again, with dizzy brain,
The human life I take;
And my red right hand grows raging hot,
Like Cranmer's at the stake.

XXXV

"And still no peace for the restless clay
Will wave or mould allow;
The horrid thing pursues my soul,—
It stands before me now!"
The fearful Boy look'd up, and saw
Huge drops upon his brow.

XXXVI

That very night, while gentle sleep
The urchin eyelids kiss'd,
Two stern-faced men set out from Lynn,
Through the cold and heavy mist;
And Eugene Aram walk'd between,
With gyves upon his wrist.

SONNET

FOR THE 14TH OF FEBRUARY

No popular respect will I omit
To do thee honour on this happy day,
When every loyal lover tasks his wit
His simple truth in studious rhymes to pay,
And to his mistress dear his hopes convey.
Rather thou knowest I would still outrun
All calendars with Love's,—whose date alway
Thy bright eyes govern better than the Sun,—
For with thy favour was my life begun;
And still I reckon on from smiles to smiles,
And not by summers, for I thrive on none
But those thy cheerful countenance compiles:
Oh! if it be to choose and call thee mine,
Love, thou art every day my Valentine.

THE DEATH-BED

We watch'd her breathing through the night,
Her breathing soft and low,
As in her breast the wave of life
Kept heaving to and fro.

So silently we seem'd to speak,
So slowly moved about,
As we had lent her half our powers
To eke her living out.

Our very hopes belied our fears,
Our fears our hopes belied—
We thought her dying when she slept,
And sleeping when she died.

For when the morn came dim and sad,
And chill with early showers,
Her quiet eyelids closed—she had
Another morn than ours.

ANTICIPATION

"Coming events cast their shadow before."

I HAD a vision in the summer light—
Sorrow was in it, and my inward sight
Ached with sad images. The touch of tears
Gushed down my cheeks:—the figured woes of years
Casting their shadows across sunny hours.
Oh, there was nothing sorrowful in flowers
Wooing the glances of an April sun,
Or apple blossoms opening one by one
Their crimson bosoms—or the twittered words
And warbled sentences of merry birds;—
Or the small glitter and the humming wings
Of golden flies and many coloured things—
Oh, these were nothing sad—nor to see *Her*,
Sitting beneath the comfortable stir
Of early leaves—casting the playful grace
Of moving shadows in so fair a face—
Nor in her brow serene—nor in the love
Of her mild eyes drinking the light above
With a long thirst—nor in her gentle smile—
Nor in her hand that shone blood-red the while
She raised it in the sun. All these were dear
To heart and eye—but an invisible fear
Shook in the trees and chilled upon the air,
And if one spot was laughing brightest—there
My soul most sank and darkened in despair!—
As if the shadows of a curtained room
Haunted me in the sun—as if the bloom
Of early flow'rets had no sweets for me,

Nor apple blossoms any blush to see—
As if the hour had brought too bright a day—
And little birds were all too gay!—too gay!—
As if the beauty of that Lovely One
Were all a fable.—Full before the sun
Stood Death and cast a shadow long before,
Like a dark pall enshrouding her all o'er,
Till eyes, and lips, and smiles, were all no more!

TO A CHILD EMBRACING HIS MOTHER

Love thy mother, little one!
Kiss and clasp her neck again,—
Hereafter she may have a son
Will kiss and clasp her neck in vain.
  Love thy mother, little one!

Gaze upon her living eyes,
And mirror back her love for thee,—
Hereafter thou mayst shudder sighs
To meet them when they cannot see.
  Gaze upon her living eyes!

Press her lips the while they glow
With love that they have often told,—
Hereafter thou mayst press in woe,
And kiss them till thine own are cold.
  Press her lips the while they glow!

Oh, revere her raven hair!
Although it be not silver-grey;
Too early Death, led on by Care,
May snatch save one dear lock away.
  Oh, revere her raven hair!

Pray for her at eve and morn,
That Heaven may long the stroke defer,—
For thou mayst live the hour forlorn
When thou wilt ask to die with her.
  Pray for her at eve and morn!

STANZAS

(FROM *TYLNEY HALL*)

STILL glides the gentle streamlet on,
With shifting current new and strange;
The water that was here is gone,
But those green shadows do not change.

Serene, or ruffled by the storm,
On present waves as on the past,
The mirrored grave retains its form,
The self-same trees their semblance cast.

The hue each fleeting globule wears,
That drop bequeaths it to the next,
One picture still the surface bears,
To illustrate the murmured text.

So, love, however time may flow,
Fresh hours pursuing those that flee
One constant image still shall show
My tide of life is true to thee!

SONNET TO OCEAN

SHALL I rebuke thee, Ocean, my old love,
That once, in rage, with the wild winds at strife,
Thou darest menace my unit of a life,
Sending my clay below, my soul above,
Whilst roar'd thy waves, like lions when they rove
By night, and bound upon their prey by stealth?
Yet didst thou ne'er restore my fainting health?—
Didst thou ne'er murmur gently like the dove?
Nay, dost thou not against my own dear shore
Full break, last link between my land and me?—
My absent friends talk in thy very roar,
In thy waves' beat their kindly pulse I see,
And, if I must not see my England more,
Next to her soil, my grave be found in thee!

TO ———

COMPOSED AT ROTTERDAM

I

I GAZE upon a city,—
A city new and strange,—
Down many a watery vista
My fancy takes a range;
From side to side I saunter,
And wonder where I am;
And can *you* be in England,
And *I* at Rotterdam!

II

Before me lie dark waters
In broad canals and deep,
Whereon the silver moonbeams
Sleep, restless in their sleep;
A sort of vulgar Venice
Reminds me where I am;
Yes, yes, you are in England,
And I'm at Rotterdam.

III

Tall houses with quaint gables,
Where frequent windows shine,
And quays that lead to bridges,
And trees in formal line,
And masts of spicy vessels
From western Surinam,
All tell me you're in England,
But I'm in Rotterdam.

IV

Those sailors, how outlandish
The face and form of each!
They deal in foreign gestures,
And use a foreign speech;
A tongue not learn'd near Isis,
Or studied by the Cam,
Declares that you're in England,
And I'm at Rotterdam.

V

And now across a market
My doubtful way I trace,
Where stands a solemn statue,
The Genius of the place;
And to the great Erasmus
I offer my salaam;
Who tells me you're in England,
But I'm at Rotterdam.

VI

The coffee-room is open—
I mingle in its crowd,—
The dominos are noisy—
The hookahs raise a cloud;
The flavour, none of Fearon's,
That mingles with my dram,
Reminds me you're in England,
And I'm at Rotterdam.

VII

Then here it goes, a bumper—
The toast it shall be mine,
In schiedam, or in sherry,
Tokay, or hock of Rhine;
It well deserves the brightest,
Where sunbeam ever swam—
"The Girl I love in England"
I drink at Rotterdam!

LINES

ON SEEING MY WIFE AND TWO CHILDREN SLEEPING IN THE SAME CHAMBER

AND has the earth lost its so spacious round,
The sky its blue circumference above,
That in this little chamber there is found
Both earth and heaven—my universe of love!
All that my God can give me, or remove,
Here sleeping, save myself, in mimic death.
Sweet that in this small compass I behove
To live their living and to breathe their breath!
Almost I wish that, with one common sigh,
We might resign all mundane care and strife,
And seek together that transcendent sky,
Where Father, Mother, Children, Husband, Wife,
Together pant in everlasting life!

STANZAS

Is there a bitter pang for love removed,
O God! The dead love doth not cost more tears
Than the alive, the loving, the beloved—
Not yet, not yet beyond all hopes and fears!
Would I were laid
Under the shade
Of the calm grave, and the long grass of years,—

That love might die with sorrow:—I am sorrow;
And she, that loves me tenderest, doth press
Most poison from my cruel lips, and borrow
Only new anguish from the old caress;
Oh, this world's grief
Hath no relief
In being wrung from a great happiness.

Would I had never filled thine eyes with love,
For love is only tears: would I had never
Breathed such a curse-like blessing as we prove;
Now, if "Farewell" *could* bless thee, I would sever!
Would I were laid
Under the shade
Of the cold tomb, and the long grass for ever!

ODE TO RAE WILSON, ESQ.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE *ATHENÆUM*

MY DEAR SIR—The following Ode was written anticipating the tone of some strictures on my writings by the gentleman to whom it is addressed. I have not seen his book; but I know by hearsay that some of my verses are characterised as "profaneness and ribaldry"—citing, in proof, the description of a certain sow, from whose jaw a cabbage sprout

> "Protruded, as the dove so staunch
> For peace supports an olive branch."

If the printed works of my Censor had not prepared me for any misapplication of *types*, I should have been surprised by this misapprehension of one of the commonest emblems. In some cases the dove unquestionably stands for the Divine Spirit; but the same bird is also a lay representative of the peace of this world, and, as such, has figured time out of mind in allegorical pictures. The sense in which it was used by me is plain from the context; at least, it would be plain to any one but a fisher for faults, predisposed to carp at some things, to dab at others, and to flounder in all. But I am possibly in error. It is the female swine, perhaps, that is profaned in the eyes of the Oriental tourist. Men find strange ways of marking their intolerance; and the spirit is certainly strong enough, in Mr. W.'s works, to set up a creature as sacred, in sheer opposition to the Mussulman, with whom she is a beast of abomination. It would only be going the whole sow.—I am, dear Sir, yours very truly,

THOS. HOOD.

"Close, close your eyes with holy dread,
And weave a circle round him thrice,
For he on honey-dew hath fed
And drunk the milk of Paradise."—COLERIDGE.

"It's very hard them kind of men
Won't let a body be."—*Old Ballad.*

A WANDERER, Wilson, from my native land,
Remote, O Rae, from godliness and thee,
Where rolls between us the eternal sea,
Besides some furlongs of a foreign sand,—
Beyond the broadest Scotch of London Wall;
Beyond the loudest Saint that has a call;
Across the wavy waste between us stretch'd,
A friendly missive warns me of a stricture,
Wherein my likeness you have darkly etch'd,
And though I have not seen the shadow sketch'd,
Thus I remark prophetic on the picture.

I guess the features:—in a line to paint
Their moral ugliness, I'm not a saint.
Not one of those self-constituted saints,
Quacks—not physicians—in the cure of souls,
Censors who sniff out mortal taints,
And call the devil over his own coals—
Those pseudo Privy Councillors of God,
Who write down judgments with a pen hard-nibb'd;
Ushers of Beelzebub's Black Rod,
Commending sinners, not to ice thick-ribb'd,
But endless flames, to scorch them up like flax—
Yet sure of heav'n themselves, as if they'd cribb'd
Th' impression of St. Peter's keys in wax!

Of such a character no single trace
Exists, I know, in my fictitious face;
There wants a certain cast about the eye;
A certain lifting of the nose's tip;
A certain curling of the nether lip,
In scorn of all that is, beneath the sky;

In brief it is an aspect deleterious,
A face decidedly not serious,
A face profane, that would not do at all
To make a face at Exeter Hall,—
That Hall where bigots rant, and cant, and pray,
And laud each other face to face,
Till ev'ry farthing-candle *ray*
Conceives itself a great gas-light of grace.

Well!—be the graceless lineaments confest!
I do enjoy this bounteous beauteous earth;
And dote upon a jest
"Within the limits of becoming mirth";—
No solemn sanctimonious face I pull,
Nor think I'm pious when I'm only bilious—
Nor study in my sanctum supercilious
To frame a Sabbath Bill or forge a Bull.
I pray for grace—repent each sinful act—
Peruse, but underneath the rose, my Bible;
And love my neighbour far too well, in fact,
To call and twit him with a godly tract
That's turn'd by application to a libel.
My heart ferments not with the bigot's leaven,
All creeds I view with toleration thorough,
And have a horror of regarding heaven
As anybody's rotten borough.

What else? no part I take in party fray,
With tropes from Billingsgate's slang-whanging tartars,
I fear no Pope—and let great Ernest play
At Fox and Goose with Fox's Martyrs!
I own I laugh at over-righteous men,
I own I shake my sides at ranters,
And treat sham-Abr'am saints with wicked banters,
I even own, that there are times—but then
It's when I've got my wine—I say d—— canters!

I've no ambition to enact the spy
On fellow souls, a Spiritual Pry—

'Tis said that people ought to guard their noses,
Who thrust them into matters none of theirs;
And tho' no delicacy discomposes
Your Saint, yet I consider faith and pray'rs
Amongst the privatest of men's affairs.

I do not hash the Gospel in my books,
And thus upon the public mind intrude it,
As if I thought, like Otaheitan cooks,
No food was fit to eat till I had chewed it.

On Bible stilts I don't affect to stalk;
Nor lard with Scripture my familiar talk,—
For man may pious texts repeat,
And yet religion have no inward seat;
'Tis not so plain as the old Hill of Howth,
A man has got his belly full of meat
Because he talks with victuals in his mouth!

Mere verbiage,—it is not worth a carrot!
Why, Socrates—or Plato—where's the odds?—
Once taught a jay to supplicate the Gods,
And made a Polly-theist of a Parrot!

A mere professor, spite of all his cant, is
Not a whit better than a Mantis,—
An insect, of what clime I can't determine,
That lifts its paws most parson-like, and thence,
By simple savages—thro' sheer pretence—
Is reckon'd quite a saint amongst the vermin.
But where's the reverence, or where the *nous*,
To ride on one's religion thro' the lobby,
Whether a stalking-horse or hobby,
To show its pious paces to "the House"?

I honestly confess that I would hinder
The Scottish member's legislative rigs,

        That spiritual Pinder,
Who looks on erring souls as straying pigs,
That must be lash'd by law, wherever found,
And driv'n to church, as to the parish pound.
I do confess, without reserve or wheedle,
I view that grovelling idea as one
Worthy some parish clerk's ambitious son,
A charity-boy, who longs to be a beadle.

On such a vital topic sure 'tis odd
How much a man can differ from his neighbour:
One wishes worship freely giv'n to God,
Another wants to make it statute-labour—
The broad distinction in a line to draw,
As means to lead us to the skies above,
You say—Sir Andrew and his love of law,
And I—the Saviour with his law of love.

Spontaneously to God should tend the soul,
Like the magnetic needle to the Pole;
But what were that intrinsic virtue worth,
Suppose some fellow, with more zeal than knowledge,
        Fresh from St. Andrew's College,
Should nail the conscious needle to the north?

I do confess that I abhor and shrink
From schemes, with a religious willy-nilly,
That frown upon St. Giles's sins, but blink
The peccadilloes of all Piccadilly—
My soul revolts at such a bare hypocrisy,
And will not, dare not, fancy in accord
The Lord of Hosts with an Exclusive Lord
        Of this world's aristocracy.
It will not own a notion so unholy,
As thinking that the rich by easy trips
May go to heav'n, whereas the poor and lowly
Must work their passage, as they do in ships.

One place there is—beneath the burial sod,
Where all mankind are equalised by death;
Another place there is—the Fane of God,
Where all are equal, who draw living breath;—
Juggle who will *elsewhere* with his own soul,
Playing the Judas with a temporal dole—
He who can come beneath that awful cope,
In the dread presence of a Maker just,
Who metes to ev'ry pinch of human dust
One even measure of immortal hope—
He who can stand within that holy door,
With soul unbow'd by that pure spirit-level,
And frame unequal laws for rich and poor,—
Might sit for Hell and represent the Devil!

Such are the solemn sentiments, O Rae,
In your last Journey-Work, perchance you ravage,
Seeming, but in more courtly terms, to say
I'm but a heedless, creedless, godless savage;
A very Guy, deserving fire and faggots,—
    A Scoffer, always on the grin,
And sadly given to the mortal sin
Of liking Mawworms less than merry maggots!

The humble records of my life to search,
I have not herded with mere pagan beasts;
But sometimes I have "sat at good men's feasts,"
And I have been "where bells have knoll'd to church."
Dear bells! how sweet the sounds of village bells
When on the undulating air they swim!
Now loud as welcomes! faint, now, as farewells!
And trembling all about the breezy dells
As flutter'd by the wings of Cherubim.
Meanwhile the bees are chanting a low hymn;
And lost to sight th' ecstatic lark above
Sings, like a soul beatified, of love,—
With, now and then, the coo of the wild pigeon;—
O Pagans, Heathens, Infidels and Doubters!

If such sweet sounds can't woo you to religion,
Will the harsh voices of church cads and touters?

A man may cry "Church! Church!" at ev'ry word,
With no more piety than other people—
A daw's not reckon'd a religious bird
Because it keeps a-cawing from a steeple.
The Temple is a good, a holy place,
But quacking only gives it an ill savour;
While saintly mountebanks the porch disgrace,
And bring religion's self into disfavour!

Behold yon servitor of God and Mammon,
Who, binding up his Bible with his Ledger,
　　Blends Gospel texts with trading gammon,
A black-leg saint, a spiritual hedger,
Who backs his rigid Sabbath, so to speak,
Against the wicked remnant of the week,
A saving bet against his sinful bias—
"Rogue that I am," he whispers to himself,
"I lie—I cheat—do anything for pelf,
But who on earth can say I am not pious?"

In proof how over-righteousness re-acts,
Accept an anecdote well based on facts.
One Sunday morning—(at the day don't fret)—
In riding with a friend to Ponder's End
Outside the stage, we happen'd to commend
A certain mansion that we saw To Let.
"Ay," cried our coachman, with our talk to grapple,
"You're right! no house along the road comes nigh it!
'Twas built by the same man as built yon chapel
　　And master wanted once to buy it,—
But t'other driv the bargain much too hard—
　　He ax'd sure-*ly* a sum purdigious!
But being so particular religious,
Why, *that*, you see, put master on his guard!"

Church is "a little heav'n below,
I have been there and still would go,"—
Yet I am none of those, who think it odd
A man can pray unbidden from the cassock,
And, passing by the customary hassock,
Kneel down remote upon the simple sod,
And sue in formâ pauperis to God.

As for the rest,—intolerant to none,
Whatever shape the pious rite may bear,
Ev'n the poor Pagan's homage to the Sun
I would not harshly scorn, lest even there
I spurn'd some elements of Christian pray'r—
An aim, tho' erring, at a "world ayont"—
Acknowledgment of good—of man's futility,
A sense of need, and weakness, and indeed
That very thing so many Christians want—
Humility.

Such, unto Papists, Jews or turban'd Turks,
Such is my spirit—(I don't mean my wraith !)
Such, may it please you, is my humble faith ;
I know, full well, you do not like my *works !*

I have not sought, 'tis true, the Holy Land,
As full of texts as Cuddie Headrigg's mother,
The Bible in one hand,
And my own commonplace-book in the other—
But you have been to Palestine—alas !
Some minds improve by travel, others, rather,
Resemble copper wire, or brass,
Which gets the narrower by going farther !
Worthless are all such Pilgrimages—very !
If Palmers at the Holy Tomb contrive
The human heats and rancour to revive
That at the Sepulchre they ought to bury.
A sorry sight it is to rest the eye on,
To see a Christian creature graze at Sion,

Then homeward, of the saintly pasture full,
Rush bellowing, and breathing fire and smoke,
At crippled Papistry to butt and poke,
Exactly as a skittish Scottish bull
Hunts an old woman in a scarlet cloak!

Why leave a serious, moral, pious home,
Scotland, renown'd for sanctity of old,
Far distant Catholics to rate and scold
For—doing as the Romans do at Rome?
With such a bristling spirit wherefore quit
The Land of Cakes for any land of wafers,
About the graceless images to flit,
And buzz and chafe importunate as chafers,
Longing to carve the carvers to Scotch collops?—
People who hold such absolute opinions
Should stay at home, in Protestant dominions,
  Not travel like male Mrs. Trollopes.

Gifted with noble tendency to climb,
  Yet weak at the same time,
Faith is a kind of parasitic plant,
That grasps the nearest stem with tendril-rings;
And as the climate and the soil may grant,
So is the sort of tree to which it clings.
Consider then, before, like Hurlothrumbo,
You aim your club at any creed on earth,
That, by the simple accident of birth,
You might have been High Priest to Mumbo Jumbo.

For me—thro' heathen ignorance perchance,
Not having knelt in Palestine,—I feel
None of that griffinish excess of zeal,
Some travellers would blaze with here in France.
Dolls I can see in Virgin-like array,
Nor for a scuffle with the idols hanker
Like crazy Quixote at the puppet's play,
If their "offence be rank," should mine be *rancour*?

Mild light, and by degrees, should be the plan
To cure the dark and erring mind;
But who would rush at a benighted man,
And give him two black eyes for being blind?

Suppose the tender but luxuriant hop
Around a canker'd stem should twine,
What Kentish boor would tear away the prop
So roughly as to wound, nay, kill the bine?
The images, 'tis true, are strangely dress'd,
With gauds and toys extremely out of season;
The carving nothing of the very best,
The whole repugnant to the eye of reason,
Shocking to Taste, and to Fine Arts a treason—
Yet ne'er o'erlook in bigotry of sect
One truly *Catholic*, one common form,
At which uncheck'd
All Christian hearts may kindle or keep warm.

Say, was it to my spirit's gain or loss,
One bright and balmy morning, as I went
From Liege's lovely environs to Ghent,
If hard by the wayside I found a cross,
That made me breathe a pray'r upon the spot—
While Nature of herself, as if to trace
The emblem's use, had trail'd around its base
The blue significant Forget-me-not?
Methought, the claims of Charity to urge
More forcibly, along with Faith and Hope,
The pious choice had pitch'd upon the verge
Of a delicious slope,
Giving the eye much variegated scope;—
"Look round," it whisper'd, "on that prospect rare,
Those vales so verdant, and those hills so blue;
Enjoy the sunny world, so fresh, and fair,
But"—(how the simple legend pierced me thro'!)
"PRIEZ POUR LES MALHEUREUX."

With sweet kind natures, as in honey'd cells,
Religion lives, and feels herself at home;
But only on a formal visit dwells
Where wasps instead of bees have formed the comb.
Shun pride, O Rae!—whatever sort beside
You take in lieu, shun spiritual pride!
A pride there is of rank—a pride of birth,
A pride of learning, and a pride of purse,
A London pride—in short, there be on earth
A host of prides, some better and some worse;
But of all prides, since Lucifer's attaint,
The proudest swells a self-elected Saint.

To picture that cold pride so harsh and hard,
Fancy a peacock in a poultry yard.
Behold him in conceited circles sail,
Strutting and dancing, and now planted stiff,
In all his pomp of pageantry, as if
He felt "the eyes of Europe" on his tail!
As for the humble breed retain'd by man,
  He scorns the whole domestic clan—
  He bows, he bridles,
  He wheels, he sidles,
At last, with stately dodgings, in a corner
He pens a simple russet hen, to scorn her
Full in the blaze of his resplendent fan!

  "Look here," he cries (to give him words),
  "Thou feather'd clay—thou scum of birds!"
Flirting the rustling plumage in her eyes,—
"Look here, thou vile predestined sinner,
  Doom'd to be roasted for a dinner,
Behold these lovely variegated dyes!
These are the rainbow colours of the skies,
That Heav'n has shed upon me *con amore*—
A Bird of Paradise?—a pretty story!
I am that Saintly Fowl, thou paltry chick!
  Look at my crown of glory!

Thou dingy, dirty, drabbled, draggled jill!"
And off goes Partlet, wriggling from a kick,
With bleeding scalp laid open by his bill!

That little simile exactly paints
How sinners are despised by saints.
By saints!—the Hypocrites that ope heav'n's door
Obsequious to the sinful man of riches—
But put the wicked, naked, barelegg'd poor
In parish stocks instead of breeches.

The Saints!—the Bigots that in public spout,
Spread phosphorus of zeal on scraps of fustian,
And go like walking "Lucifers" about
Mere living bundles of combustion.

The Saints!—the aping Fanatics that talk
All cant and rant, and rhapsodies high-flown—
That bid you baulk
A Sunday walk,
And shun God's work as you should shun your own.

The Saints!—the Formalists, the extra pious,
Who think the mortal husk can save the soul,
By trundling with a mere mechanic bias,
To church, just like a lignum-vitæ bowl!

The Saints!—the Pharisees, whose beadle stands
Beside a stern coercive kirk.
A piece of human mason-work,
Calling all sermons contrabands,
In that great Temple that's not made with hands!

Thrice blessed, rather, is the man, with whom
The gracious prodigality of nature,
The balm, the bliss, the beauty, and the bloom,
The bounteous providence in ev'ry feature,
Recall the good Creator to his creature,

Making all earth a fane, all heav'n its dome!
To *his* tuned spirit the wild heather-bells
Ring Sabbath knells;
The jubilate of the soaring lark
Is chant of clerk;
For choir, the thrush and the gregarious linnet;
The sod's a cushion for his pious want;
And, consecrated by the heav'n within it,
The sky-blue pool, a font.
Each cloud-capp'd mountain is a holy altar;
An organ breathes in every grove;
And the full heart's a Psalter,
Rich in deep hymns of gratitude and love!

Sufficiently by stern necessitarians
Poor Nature, with her face begrimed by dust,
Is stoked, coked, smoked, and almost choked; but must
Religion have its own Utilitarians,
Labell'd with evangelical phylacteries,
To make the road to heav'n a railway trust,
And churches—that's the naked fact—mere factories?

Oh! simply open wide the Temple door,
And let the solemn, swelling, organ greet,
With *Voluntaries* meet,
The willing advent of the rich and poor!
And while to God the loud Hosannas soar,
With rich vibrations from the vocal throng—
From quiet shades that to the woods belong,
And brooks with music of their own,
Voices may come to swell the choral song
With notes of praise they learn'd in musings lone.

How strange it is while on all vital questions,
That occupy the House and public mind,
We always meet with some humane suggestions
Of gentle measures of a healing kind,
Instead of harsh severity and vigour,

The Saint alone his preference retains
For bills of penalties and pains,
And marks his narrow code with legal rigour!
Why shun, as worthless of affiliation,
What men of all political persuasion
Extol—and even use upon occasion—
That Christian principle, Conciliation?
But possibly the men who make such fuss
With Sunday pippins and old Trots infirm,
Attach some other meaning to the term,
As thus:

One market morning, in my usual rambles,
Passing along Whitechapel's ancient shambles,
Where meat was hung in many a joint and quarter,
I had to halt awhile, like other folks,
To let a killing butcher coax
A score of lambs and fatted sheep to slaughter.
A sturdy man he look'd to fell an ox,
Bull-fronted, ruddy, with a formal streak
Of well-greased hair down either cheek,
As if he dee-dash-dee'd some other flocks
Beside those woolly-headed stubborn blocks
That stood before him, in vexatious huddle—
Poor little lambs, with bleating wethers group'd,
While, now and then, a thirsty creature stoop'd
And meekly snuff'd, but did not taste the puddle.

Fierce bark'd the dog, and many a blow was dealt,
That loin, and chump, and scrag and saddle felt,
Yet still, that fatal step they all declined it,—
And shunn'd the tainted door as if they smelt
Onions, mint sauce, and lemon juice behind it.
At last there came a pause of brutal force,
The cur was silent, for his jaws were full
Of tangled locks of tarry wool,
The man had whoop'd and holloed till dead hoarse.
The time was ripe for mild expostulation,

And thus it stammer'd from a stander-by—
"Zounds!—my good fellow,—it quite makes me—why,
It really—my dear fellow—do just try
Conciliation!"

Stringing his nerves like flint,
The sturdy butcher seized upon the hint,—
At least he seized upon the foremost wether,—
And hugg'd and lugg'd and tugg'd him neck and crop
Just *nolens volens* thro' the open shop—
If tails come off he didn't care a feather,—
Then walking to the door and smiling grim,
He rubb'd his forehead and his sleeve together—
"There!—I have *con*ciliated him!"

Again—good-humouredly to end our quarrel—
(Good humour should prevail!)
I'll fit you with a tale,
Whereto is tied a moral.

Once on a time a certain English lass
Was seized with symptoms of such deep decline,
Cough, hectic flushes, ev'ry evil sign,
That, as their wont is at such desperate pass,
The Doctors gave her over—to an ass.

Accordingly, the grisly Shade to bilk,
Each morn the patient quaff'd a frothy bowl
Of asinine new milk,
Robbing a shaggy suckling of a foal
Which got proportionably spare and skinny—
Meanwhile the neighbours cried "Poor Mary Ann!
She can't get over it! she never can!"
When lo! to prove each prophet was a ninny
The one that died was the poor wet-nurse Jenny.

To aggravate the case,
There were but two grown donkeys in the place;

And most unluckily for Eve's sick daughter,
The other long-ear'd creature was a male,
Who never in his life had given a pail
Of milk, or even chalk and water.
No matter: at the usual hour of eight
Down trots a donkey to the wicket-gate,
With Mister Simon Gubbins on his back,—
"Your sarvant, Miss,—a werry spring-like day,—
Bad time for hasses tho'! good lack! good lack!
Jenny be dead, Miss,—but I'ze brought ye Jack,
He doesn't give no milk—but he can bray."

So runs the story,
And, in vain self-glory,
Some Saints would sneer at Gubbins for his blindness—
But what the better are their pious saws
To ailing souls, than dry hee-haws,
Without the milk of human kindness?

TO MY DAUGHTER

ON HER BIRTHDAY

Dear Fanny! nine long years ago,
While yet the morning sun was low,
And rosy with the Eastern glow
  The landscape smiled—
Whilst lowed the newly-waken'd herds—
Sweet as the early song of birds,
I heard those first, delightful words,
  "Thou hast a Child!"

Along with that uprising dew
Tears glisten'd in my eyes, though few,
To hail a dawning quite as new
  To me, as Time:
It was not sorrow—not annoy—
But like a happy maid, though coy,
With grief-like welcome even Joy
  Forestalls its prime.

So mayst thou live, dear! many years,
In all the bliss that life endears,
Not without smiles, nor yet from tears
  Too strictly kept:
When first thy infant littleness
I folded in my fond caress,
The greatest proof of happiness
  Was this—I wept.

MISS KILMANSEGG AND HER PRECIOUS LEG

A GOLDEN LEGEND

"What is here?
Gold! yellow, glittering, precious gold?"
Timon of Athens.

Her Pedigree

I

To trace the Kilmansegg pedigree
To the very root of the family tree
   Were a task as rash as ridiculous:
Through antediluvian mists as thick
As London fog such a line to pick
Were enough, in truth, to puzzle old Nick,—
   Not to name Sir Harris Nicolas.

II

It wouldn't require much verbal strain
To trace the Kill-man, perchance, to Cain;
   But, waiving all such digressions,
Suffice it, according to family lore,
A Patriarch Kilmansegg lived of yore,
   Who was famed for his great possessions.

III

Tradition said he feather'd his nest
Through an Agricultural Interest
   In the Golden Age of Farming;
When golden eggs were laid by the geese,
And Colchian sheep wore a golden fleece,
And golden pippins—the sterling kind
Of Hesperus—now so hard to find—
   Made Horticulture quite charming!

IV

A Lord of Land, on his own estate,
He lived at a very lively rate,
  But his income would bear carousing;
Such acres he had of pasture and heath,
With herbage so rich from the ore beneath,
The very ewe's and lambkin's teeth
  Were turn'd into gold by browsing.

V

He gave, without any extra thrift,
A flock of sheep for a birthday gift
  To each son of his loins, or daughter:
And his debts—if debts he had—at will
He liquidated by giving each bill
  A dip in Pactolian water.

VI

'Twas said that even his pigs of lead,
By crossing with some by Midas bred,
  Made a perfect mine of his piggery.
And as for cattle, one yearling bull
Was worth all Smithfield-market full
  Of the Golden Bulls of Pope Gregory.

VII

The high-bred horses within his stud,
Like human creatures of birth and blood,
  Had their Golden Cups and flagons:
And as for the common husbandry nags,
Their noses were tied in money-bags,
  When they stopp'd with the carts and waggons.

VIII

Moreover, he had a Golden Ass,
Sometimes at stall, and sometimes at grass,
  That was worth his own weight in money—

And a golden hive, on a Golden Bank,
Where golden bees, by alchemical prank,
Gather'd gold instead of honey.

IX

Gold! and gold! and gold without end!
He had gold to lay by, and gold to spend,
Gold to give, and gold to lend,
And reversions of gold *in futuro.*
In wealth the family revell'd and roll'd,
Himself and wife and sons so bold;—
And his daughters sang to their harps of gold
"O bella eta del' oro!"

X

Such was the tale of the Kilmansegg Kin,
In golden text on a vellum skin,
Though certain people would wink and grin,
And declare the whole story a parable—
That the Ancestor rich was one Jacob Ghrimes,
Who held a long lease, in prosperous times,
Of acres, pasture and arable.

XI

That as money makes money, his golden bees
Were the Five per Cents, or which you please,
When his cash was more than plenty—
That the golden cups were racing affairs;
And his daughters, who sang Italian airs,
Had their golden harps of Clementi.

XII

That the Golden Ass, or Golden Bull,
Was English John, with his pockets full,
Then at war by land and water:
While beef, and mutton, and other meat,
Were almost as dear as money to eat,
And Farmers reaped Golden Harvests of wheat
At the Lord knows what per quarter!

Her Birth

XIII

What different dooms our birthdays bring!
For instance, one little manikin thing
Survives to wear many a wrinkle;
While Death forbids another to wake,
And a son that it took nine moons to make
Expires without even a twinkle!

XIV

Into this world we come like ships,
Launch'd from the docks, and stocks, and slips,
For fortune fair or fatal;
And one little craft is cast away
In its very first trip in Babbicome Bay,
While another rides safe at Port Natal.

XV

What different lots our stars accord!
This babe to be hail'd and woo'd as a Lord!
And that to be shunn'd like a leper!
One, to the world's wine, honey, and corn,
Another, like Colchester native, born
To its vinegar, only, and pepper.

XVI

One is litter'd under a roof
Neither wind nor water proof—
That's the prose of Love in a Cottage—
A puny, naked, shivering wretch,
The whole of whose birthright would not fetch,
Though Robins himself drew up the sketch,
The bid of "a mess of pottage."

XVII

Born of Fortunatus's kin,
Another comes tenderly ushered in
To a prospect all bright and burnish'd:
No tenant he for life's back slums—
He comes to the world, as a gentleman comes
To a lodging ready furnish'd.

XVIII

And the other sex—the tender—the fair—
What wide reverses of fate are there!
Whilst Margaret, charm'd by the Bulbul rare,
In a garden of Gul reposes—
Poor Peggy hawks nosegays from street to street
Till—think of that, who find life so sweet!—
She hates the smell of roses!

XIX

Not so with the infant Kilmansegg!
She was not born to steal or beg,
Or gather cresses in ditches;
To plait the straw, or bind the shoe,
Or sit all day to hem and sew,
As females must—and not a few—
To fill their insides with stitches!

XX

She was not doom'd, for bread to eat,
To be put to her hands as well as her feet—
To carry home linen from mangles—
Or heavy-hearted, and weary-limb'd,
To dance on a rope in a jacket trimm'd
With as many blows as spangles.

XXI

She was one of those who by Fortune's boon
Are born, as they say, with a silver spoon

In her mouth, not a wooden ladle:
To speak according to poet's wont,
Plutus as sponsor stood at her font,
And Midas rock'd the cradle.

XXII

At her first *début* she found her head
On a pillow of down, in a downy bed,
With a damask canopy over.
For although, by the vulgar popular saw,
All mothers are said to be "in the straw,"
Some children are born in clover.

XXIII

Her very first draught of vital air,
It was not the common chameleon fare
Of plebeian lungs and noses,—
No—her earliest sniff
Of this world was a whiff
Of the genuine Otto of Roses!

XXIV

When she saw the light, it was no mere ray
Of that light so common—so everyday—
That the sun each morning launches—
But six wax tapers dazzled her eyes,
From a thing—a gooseberry bush for size—
With a golden stem and branches.

XXV

She was born exactly at half-past two,
As witness'd a timepiece in ormolu
That stood on a marble table—
Showing at once the time of day,
And a team of *Gildings* running away
As fast as they were able,
With a golden God, with a golden Star,
And a golden Spear, in a golden Car,
According to Grecian fable.

XXVI

Like other babes, at her birth she cried;
Which made a sensation far and wide—
Ay, for twenty miles around her:
For though to the ear 'twas nothing more
Than an infant's squall, it was really the roar
Of a Fifty-thousand Pounder!
It shook the next heir
In his library chair,
And made him cry, "Confound her!"

XXVII

Of signs and omens there was no dearth,
Any more than at Owen Glendower's birth,
Or the advent of other great people:
Two bullocks dropp'd dead,
As if knock'd on the head,
And barrels of stout
And ale ran about,
And the village bells such a peal rang out,
That they crack'd the village steeple.

XXVIII

In no time at all, like mushroom spawn,
Tables sprang up all over the lawn;
Not furnish'd scantly or shabbily,
But on scale as vast
As that huge repast,
With its loads and cargoes
Of drink and botargoes,
At the Birth of the Babe in Rabelais.

XXIX

Hundreds of men were turn'd into beasts,
Like the guests at Circe's horrible feasts,
By the magic of ale and cider:
And each country lass, and each country lad,
Began to caper and dance like mad,

And ev'n some old ones appear'd to have had
A bite from the Naples Spider.

XXX

Then as night came on,
It had scared King John
Who considered such signs not risible,
To have seen the maroons,
And the whirling moons,
And the serpents of flame,
And wheels of the same,
That according to some were "whizzable."

XXXI

Oh, happy Hope of the Kilmanseggs!
Thrice happy in head, and body, and legs,
That her parents had such full pockets!
For had she been born of Want and Thrift,
For care and nursing all adrift,
It's ten to one she had had to make shift
With rickets instead of rockets!

XXXII

And how was the precious baby drest?
In a robe of the East, with lace of the West,
Like one of Crœsus's issue—
Her best bibs were made
Of rich gold brocade,
And the others of silver tissue.

XXXIII

And when the Baby inclined to nap
She was lull'd on a Gros de Naples lap,
By a nurse in a modish Paris cap,
Of notions so exalted,
She drank nothing lower than Curaçoa,
Maraschino, or pink Noyau,
And on principle never malted.

XXXIV

From a golden boat, with a golden spoon,
The babe was fed night, morning, and noon;
  And altho' the tale seems fabulous,
'Tis said her tops and bottoms were gilt,
Like the oats in that Stable-yard Palace built
  For the horse of Heliogabalus.

XXXV

And when she took to squall and kick—
For pain will wring, and pins will prick,
  E'en the wealthiest nabob's daughter—
They gave her no vulgar Dalby or gin,
But a liquor with leaf of gold therein,
  Videlicet,—Dantzic Water.

XXXVI

In short, she was born, and bred, and nurst,
And drest in the best from the very first,
  To please the genteelest censor—
And then, as soon as strength would allow,
Was vaccinated, as babes are now,
With virus ta'en from the best-bred cow
  Of Lord Althorpe's—now Earl Spencer.

Her Christening

XXXVII

Though Shakspeare asks us, "What's in a name?"
(As if cognomens were much the same),
  There's really a very great scope in it.
A name?—why, wasn't there Doctor Dodd,
That servant at once of Mammon and God,
Who found four thousand pounds and odd,
  A prison—a cart—and a rope in it?

XXXVIII

A name?—if the party had a voice,
What mortal would be a Bugg by choice?
As a Hogg, a Grubb, or a Chubb rejoice?
  Or any such nauseous blazon?
Not to mention many a vulgar name,
That would make a door-plate blush for shame,
  If door-plates were not so brazen!

XXXIX

A name?—it has more than nominal worth,
And belongs to good or bad luck at birth—
  As dames of a certain degree know.
In spite of his Page's hat and hose,
His Page's jacket, and buttons in rows,
Bob only sounds like a page in prose
  Till turn'd into Rupertino.

XL

Now to christen the infant Kilmansegg,
For days and days it was quite a plague,
  To hunt the list in the Lexicon:
And scores were tried, like coin, by the ring,
Ere names were found just the proper thing
  For a minor rich as a Mexican.

XLI

Then cards were sent, the presence to beg
Of all the kin of Kilmansegg,
  White, yellow, and brown relations:
Brothers, Wardens of City Halls,
And Uncles—rich as three Golden Balls
  From taking pledges of nations.

XLII

Nephews, whom Fortune seem'd to bewitch,
  Rising in life like rockets—

Nieces, whose doweries knew no hitch—
Aunts, as certain of dying rich
   As candles in golden sockets—
Cousins German and Cousins' sons,
All thriving and opulent—some had tons
   Of Kentish hops in their pockets!

XLIII

For money had stuck to the race through life
(As it did to the bushel when cash so rife
Posed Ali Baba's brother's wife)—
   And down to the Cousins and Coz-lings,
The fortunate brood of the Kilmanseggs,
As if they had come out of golden eggs,
   Were all as wealthy as "Goslings."

XLIV

It would fill a Court Gazette to name
What East and West End people came
   To the rite of Christianity:
The lofty Lord, and the titled Dame,
   All di'monds, plumes, and urbanity:
His Lordship the May'r with his golden chain,
And two Gold Sticks, and the Sheriffs twain,
Nine foreign Counts, and other great men
With their orders and stars, to help "M. or N."
   To renounce all pomp and vanity.

XLV

To paint the maternal Kilmansegg
The pen of an Eastern Poet would beg,
   And need an elaborate sonnet;
How she sparkled with gems whenever she stirr'd,
And her head niddle-noddled at every word,
And seem'd so happy, a Paradise Bird
   Had nidificated upon it.

XLVI

And Sir Jacob the Father strutted and bow'd,
And smiled to himself, and laugh'd aloud,
  To think of his heiress and daughter—
And then in his pockets he made a grope,
And then, in the fulness of joy and hope,
Seem'd washing his hands with invisible soap
  In imperceptible water.

XLVII

He had roll'd in money like pigs in mud,
Till it seem'd to have enter'd into his blood
  By some occult projection:
And his cheeks instead of a healthy hue,
As yellow as any guinea grew,
Making the common phrase seem true,
  About a rich complexion.

XLVIII

And now came the nurse, and during a pause,
Her dead-leaf satin would fitly cause
  A very autumnal rustle—
So full of figure, so full of fuss,
As she carried about the babe to buss,
  She seem'd to be nothing but bustle.

XLIX

A wealthy Nabob was Godpapa,
And an Indian Begum was Godmamma,
  Whose jewels a Queen might covet—
And the Priest was a Vicar, and Dean withal
Of that Temple we see with a Golden Ball,
  And a Golden Cross above it.

L

The Font was a bowl of American gold,
Won by Raleigh in days of old,
  In spite of Spanish bravado;

And the Book of Pray'r was so overrun
With gilt devices, it shone in the sun
Like a copy—a presentation one—
Of Humboldt's "El Dorado."

LI

Gold! and gold! and nothing but gold!
The same auriferous shine behold
Wherever the eye could settle!
On the walls—the sideboard—the ceiling-sky—
On the gorgeous footmen standing by,
In coats to delight a miner's eye
With seams of the precious metal.

LII

Gold! and gold! and besides the gold,
The very robe of the infant told
A tale of wealth in every fold,
It lapp'd her like a vapour!
So fine! so thin! the mind at a loss
Could compare it to nothing except a cross
Of cobweb with bank-note paper.

LIII

Then her pearls—'twas a perfect sight, forsooth,
To see them, like "the dew of her youth,"
In such a plentiful sprinkle.
Meanwhile, the Vicar read through the form,
And gave her another, not overwarm,
That made her little eyes twinkle.

LIV

Then the babe was cross'd and bless'd amain!
But instead of the Kate, or Ann, or Jane,
Which the humbler female endorses—
Instead of one name, as some people prefix,
Kilmansegg went at the tails of six,
Like a carriage of state with its horses.

LV

Oh, then the kisses she got and hugs!
The golden mugs and the golden jugs
That lent fresh rays to the midges!
The golden knives, and the golden spoons,
The gems that sparkled like fairy boons,
It was one of the Kilmansegg's own saloons,
But look'd like Rundell and Bridge's!

LVI

Gold! and gold! the new and the old!
The company ate and drank from gold,
They revell'd, they sang, and were merry;
And one of the Gold Sticks rose from his chair,
And toasted "the Lass with the golden hair"
In a bumper of Golden Sherry.

LVII

Gold! still gold! it rain'd on the nurse,
Who—unlike Danäe—was none the worse!
There was nothing but guineas glistening!
Fifty were given to Doctor James,
For calling the little Baby names,
And for saying, Amen!
The Clerk had ten,
And that was the end of the Christening.

Her Childhood

LVIII

Our youth! our childhood! that spring of springs!
'Tis surely one of the blessedest things
That nature ever invented!
When the rich are wealthy beyond their wealth,
And the poor are rich in spirits and health,
And all with their lots contented!

LIX

There's little Phelim, he sings like a thrush,
In the selfsame pair of patchwork plush,
With the selfsame empty pockets,
That tempted his daddy so often to cut
His throat, or jump in the water-butt—
But what cares Phelim? an empty nut
Would sooner bring tears to their sockets.

LX

Give him a collar without a skirt,
(That's the Irish linen for shirt)
And a slice of bread with a taste of dirt,
(That's Poverty's Irish butter)
And what does he lack to make him blest?
Some oyster-shells, or a sparrow's nest,
A candle-end, and a gutter.

LXI

But to leave the happy Phelim alone,
Gnawing, perchance, a marrowless bone,
For which no dog would quarrel—
Turn we to little Miss Kilmansegg,
Cutting her first little toothy-peg
With a fifty-guinea coral—
A peg upon which
About poor and rich
Reflection might hang a moral.

LXII

Born in wealth, and wealthily nursed,
Capp'd, papp'd, napp'd, and lapp'd from the first
On the knees of Prodigality,
Her childhood was one eternal round
Of the game of going on Tickler's ground
Picking up gold—in reality.

LXIII

With extempore carts she never play'd,
Or the odds and ends of a Tinker's trade,
Or little dirt pies and puddings made,
  Like children happy and squalid;
The very puppet she had to pet,
Like a bait for the "Nix my Dolly" set,
  Was a Dolly of gold—and solid!

LXIV

Gold! and gold! 'twas the burden still!
To gain the Heiress's early goodwill
  There was much corruption and bribery—
The yearly cost of her golden toys
Would have given half London's Charity Boys
And Charity Girls the annual joys
  Of a holiday dinner at Highbury.

LXV

Bon-bons she ate from the gilt *cornet;*
And gilded queens on St. Bartlemy's day;
  Till her fancy was tinged by her presents—
And first a Goldfinch excited her wish,
Then a spherical bowl with its Golden fish,
  And then two Golden Pheasants.

LXVI

Nay, once she squall'd and scream'd like wild—
And it shows how the bias we give to a child
  Is a thing most weighty and solemn:—
But whence was wonder or blame to spring
If little Miss K.,—after such a swing—
Made a dust for the flaming gilded thing
  On the top of the Fish Street column?

Her Education

LXVII

According to metaphysical creed,
To the earliest books that children read
  For much good or much bad they are debtors—
But before with their A B C they start,
There are things in morals, as well as art,
That play a very important part—
  "Impressions before the letters."

LXVIII

Dame Education begins the pile,
Mayhap in the graceful Corinthian style,
  But alas for the elevation!
If the Lady's maid or Gossip the Nurse
With a load of rubbish, or something worse,
  Have made a rotten foundation.

LXIX

Even thus with little Miss Kilmansegg,
Before she learnt her E for egg,
  Ere her Governess came, or her Masters—
Teachers of quite a different kind
Had "cramm'd" her beforehand, and put her mind
  In a go-cart on golden casters.

LXX

Long before her A B and C,
They had taught her by heart her L. S. D.
  And as how she was born a great Heiress;
And as sure as London is built of bricks,
My Lord would ask her the day to fix,
To ride in a fine gilt coach and six,
  Like Her Worship the Lady May'ress.

LXXI

Instead of stories from Edgeworth's page,
The true golden lore for our golden age,
  Or lessons from Barbauld and Trimmer,
Teaching the worth of Virtue and Health,
All that she knew was the Virtue of Wealth,
Provided by vulgar nursery stealth
  With a Book of Leaf Gold for a Primer.

LXXII

The very metal of merit they told,
And praised her for being as "good as gold"!
  Till she grew as a peacock haughty;
Of money they talk'd the whole day round,
And weigh'd desert, like grapes, by the pound,
Till she had an idea from the very sound
  That people with nought were naughty.

LXXIII

They praised—poor children with nothing at all!
Lord! how you twaddle and waddle and squall
  Like common-bred geese and ganders!
What sad little bad little figures you make
To the rich Miss K., whose plainest seed-cake
  Was stuff'd with coriandcrs!

LXXIV

They praised her falls, as well as her walk,
Flatterers make cream cheese of chalk,
They praised—how they praised—her very small talk,
  As if it fell from a Solon;
Or the girl who at each pretty phrase let drop
A ruby comma, or pearl full-stop,
  Or an emerald semi-colon.

LXXV

They praised her spirit, and now and then
The Nurse brought her own little "nevy" Ben,
To play with the future May'ress,
And when he got raps, and taps, and slaps,
Scratches, and pinches, snips, and snaps,
As if from a Tigress or Bearess,
They told him how Lords would court that hand,
And always gave him to understand,
While he rubb'd, poor soul,
His carroty poll,
That his hair had been pull'd by "a *Hairess*."

LXXVI

Such were the lessons from maid and nurse,
A Governess help'd to make still worse,
Giving an appetite so perverse
Fresh diet whereon to batten—
Beginning with A B C to hold
Like a royal playbill printed in gold
On a square of pearl-white satin.

LXXVII

The books to teach the verbs and nouns,
And those about countries, cities, and towns,
Instead of their sober drabs and browns,
Were in crimson silk, with gilt edges;—
Her Butler, and Enfield, and Entick—in short
Her "Early Lessons" of every sort,
Look'd like Souvenirs, Keepsakes, and Pledges.

LXXVIII

Old Johnson shone out in as fine array
As he did one night when he went to the play;
Chambaud like a beau of King Charles's day—
Lindley Murray in like conditions—

Each weary, unwelcome, irksome task,
Appear'd in a fancy dress and a mask;—
If you wish for similar copies, ask
For Howell and James's Editions.

LXXIX

Novels she read to amuse her mind,
But always the affluent match-making kind
That ends with Promessi Sposi,
And a father-in-law so wealthy and grand,
He could give cheque-mate to Coutts in the Strand;
So, along with a ring and posy,
He endows the Bride with Golconda off hand,
And gives the Groom Potosi.

LXXX

Plays she perused—but she liked the best
Those comedy gentlefolks always possess'd
Of fortunes so truly romantic—
Of money so ready that right or wrong
It always is ready to go for a song,
Throwing it, going it, pitching it strong—
They ought to have purses as green and long
As the cucumber call'd the Gigantic.

LXXXI

Then Eastern Tales she loved for the sake
Of the Purse of Oriental make,
And the thousand pieces they put in it—
But Pastoral scenes on her heart fell cold,
For Nature with her had lost its hold,
No field but the Field of the Cloth of Gold
Would ever have caught her foot in it.

LXXXII

What more? She learnt to sing, and dance,
To sit on a horse, although he should prance,

And to speak a French not spoken in France
  Any more than at Babel's building—
And she painted shells, and flowers, and Turks,
But her great delight was in Fancy Works
  That are done with gold or gilding.

LXXXIII

Gold! still gold!—the bright and the dead,
With golden beads, and gold lace, and gold thread
She work'd in gold, as if for her bread;
  The metal had so undermined her,
Gold ran in her thoughts and fill'd her brain,
She was golden-headed as Peter's cane
  With which he walk'd behind her.

Her Accident

LXXXIV

The horse that carried Miss Kilmansegg,
And a better never lifted leg,
  Was a very rich bay, call'd Banker—
A horse of a breed and a mettle so rare,—
By Bullion out of an Ingot mare,—
That for action, the best of figures, and air,
  It made many good judges hanker.

LXXXV

And when she took a ride in the Park,
Equestrian Lord, or pedestrian Clerk,
  Was thrown in an amorous fever,
To see the Heiress how well she sat,
With her groom behind her, Bob or Nat,
In green, half smother'd with gold, and a hat
  With more gold lace than beaver.

LXXXVI

And then when Banker obtain'd a pat,
To see how he arch'd his neck at that!
He snorted with pride and pleasure!
Like the Steed in the fable so lofty and grand,
Who gave the poor Ass to understand
That *he* didn't carry a bag of sand,
But a burden of golden treasure.

LXXXVII

A load of treasure?—alas! alas!
Had her horse but been fed upon English grass,
And shelter'd in Yorkshire spinneys,
Had he scour'd the sand with the Desert Ass,
Or where the American whinnies—
But a hunter from Erin's turf and gorse,
A regular thoroughbred Irish horse,
Why, he ran away, as a matter of course,
With a girl worth her weight in guineas!

LXXXVIII

Mayhap 'tis the trick of such pamper'd nags
To shy at the sight of a beggar in rags,—
But away, like the bolt of a rabbit,—
Away went the horse in the madness of fright,
And away went the horsewoman mocking the sight—
Was yonder blue flash a flash of blue light,
Or only the skirt of her habit?

LXXXIX

Away she flies, with the groom behind,—
It looks like a race of the Calmuck kind,
When Hymen himself is the starter,
And the Maid rides first in the fourfooted strife,
Riding, striding, as if for her life,
While the Lover rides after to catch him a wife,
Although it's catching a Tartar.

XC

But the Groom has lost his glittering hat!
Though he does not sigh and pull up for that—
Alas! his horse is a tit for Tat
  To sell to a very low bidder—
His wind is ruin'd, his shoulder is sprung,
Things, though a horse be handsome and young,
  A purchaser *will* consider.

XCI

But still flies the Heiress through stones and dust,
Oh, for a fall, if fall she must,
  On the gentle lap of Flora!
But still, thank Heaven! she clings to her seat—
Away! away! she could ride a dead heat
With the Dead who ride so fast and fleet,
  In the Ballad of Leonora!

XCII

Away she gallops!—it's awful work!
It's faster than Turpin's ride to York,
  On Bess that notable clipper!
She has circled the Ring!—she crosses the Park!
Mazeppa, although he was stripp'd so stark,
  Mazeppa couldn't outstrip her!

XCIII

The fields seem running away with the folks!
The Elms are having a race for the Oaks
  At a pace that all Jockeys disparages!
All, all is racing! the Serpentine
Seems rushing past like the "arrowy Rhine,"
The houses have got on a railway line,
  And are off like the first-class carriages!

XCIV

She'll lose her life! she is losing her breath!
A cruel chase, she is chasing Death,
As female shriekings forewarn her:
And now—as gratis as blood of Guelph—
She clears that gate, which has clear'd itself
Since then, at Hyde Park Corner!

XCV

Alas! for the hope of the Kilmanseggs!
For her head, her brains, her body, and legs,
Her life's not worth a copper!
Willy-nilly,
In Piccadilly,
A hundred hearts turn sick and chilly,
A hundred voices cry, "Stop her!"
And one old gentleman stares and stands,
Shakes his head and lifts his hands,
And says, "How very improper!"

XCVI

On and on!—what a perilous run!
The iron rails seem all mingling in one,
To shut out the Green Park scenery!
And now the Cellar its dangers reveals,
She shudders—she shrieks—she's doom'd, she feels,
To be torn by powers of horses and wheels,
Like a spinner by steam machinery!

XCVII

Sick with horror she shuts her eyes,
But the very stones seem uttering cries,
As they did to that Persian daughter,
When she climb'd up the steep vociferous hill,
Her little silver flagon to fill
With the magical Golden Water!

XCVIII

"Batter her! shatter her!
Throw and scatter her!"
Shouts each stony-hearted chatterer!
"Dash at the heavy Dover!
Spill her! kill her! tear and tatter her!
Smash her! crash her!" (the stones didn't flatter her!)
"Kick her brains out! let her blood spatter her!
Roll on her over and over!"

XCIX

For so she gather'd the awful sense
Of the street in its past unmacadamized tense,
As the wild horse overran it,—
His four heels making the clatter of six,
Like a Devil's tattoo, play'd with iron sticks
On a kettle-drum of granite!

C

On! still on! she's dazzled with hints
Of oranges, ribbons, and colour'd prints,
A Kaleidoscope jumble of shapes and tints,
And human faces all flashing,
Bright and brief as the sparks from the flints,
That the desperate hoof keeps dashing!

CI

On and on! still frightfully fast!
Dover Street, Bond Street, all are past!
But—yes—no—yes!—they're down at last!
The Furies and Fates have found them!
Down they go with sparkle and crash,
Like a Bark that's struck by the lightning flash—
There's a shriek—and a sob—
And the dense dark mob
Like a billow closes around them!

* * * * *
* * * * *

CII

"She breathes!"
"She don't!"
"She'll recover!"
"She won't!"
"She's stirring! she's living, by Nemesis!"
Gold, still gold! on counter and shelf!
Golden dishes as plenty as delf;
Miss Kilmansegg's coming again to herself
On an opulent Goldsmith's premises!

CIII

Gold! fine gold!—both yellow and red,
Beaten, and molten—polish'd, and dead—
To see the gold with profusion spread
In all forms of its manufacture!
But what avails gold to Miss Kilmansegg,
When the femoral bone of her dexter leg
Has met with a compound fracture?

CIV

Gold may soothe Adversity's smart;
Nay, help to bind up a broken heart;
But to try it on any other part
Were as certain a disappointment,
As if one should rub the dish and plate,
Taken out of a Staffordshire crate—
In the hope of a Golden Service of State—
With Singleton's "Golden Ointment."

Her Precious Leg

CV

"As the twig is bent, the tree's inclined,"
Is an adage often recall'd to mind,
  Referring to juvenile bias:
And never so well is the verity seen,
As when to the weak, warp'd side we lean,
  While Life's tempests and hurricanes try us.

CVI

Even thus with Miss K. and her broken limb:
By a very, very remarkable whim,
  She show'd her early tuition:
While the buds of character came into blow
With a certain tinge that served to show
The nursery culture long ago,
  As the graft is known by fruition!

CVII

For the King's Physician, who nursed the case,
His verdict gave with an awful face,
  And three others concurr'd to egg it;
That the Patient to give old Death the slip,
Like the Pope, instead of a personal trip,
  Must send her Leg as a Legate.

CVIII

The limb was doom'd—it couldn't be saved!
And like other people the patient behaved,
Nay, bravely that cruel parting braved,
  Which makes some persons so falter,
They rather would part, without a groan,
With the flesh of their flesh, and bone of their bone,
  They obtain'd at St. George's altar.

CIX

But when it came to fitting the stump
With a proxy limb—then flatly and plump
  She spoke, in the spirit olden;
She couldn't—she shouldn't—she wouldn't have wood!
Nor a leg of cork, if she never stood,
And she swore an oath, or something as good,
  The proxy limb should be golden!

CX

A wooden leg! what, a sort of peg,
  For your common Jockeys and Jennies!
No, no, her mother might worry and plague—
Weep, go down on her knees, and beg,
But nothing would move Miss Kilmansegg!
She could—she would have a Golden Leg,
  If it cost ten thousand guineas!

CXI

Wood indeed, in Forest or Park,
With its sylvan honours and feudal bark,
  Is an aristocratic article:
But split and sawn, and hack'd about town,
Serving all needs of pauper or clown,
Trod on! stagger'd on! Wood cut down
  Is vulgar—fibre and particle!

CXII

And Cork!—when the noble Cork Tree shades
A lovely group of Castilian maids,
  'Tis a thing for a song or sonnet!—
But cork, as it stops the bottle of gin,
Or bungs the beer—the *small* beer—in,
It pierced her heart like a corking-pin,
  To think of standing upon it!

CXIII

A Leg of Gold—solid gold throughout,
Nothing else, whether slim or stout,
   Should ever support her, God willing!
She must—she could—she would have her whim,
Her father, she turn'd a deaf ear to him—
   He might kill her—she didn't mind killing!
He was welcome to cut off her other limb—
   He might cut her all off with a shilling!

CXIV

All other promised gifts were in vain,
Golden Girdle, or Golden Chain,
She writhed with impatience more than pain,
   And utter'd "pshaws!" and "pishes!"
But a Leg of Gold as she lay in bed,
It danced before her—it ran in her head!
   It jump'd with her dearest wishes!

CXV

"Gold—gold—gold! Oh, let it be gold!"
Asleep or awake that tale she told,
   And when she grew delirious:
Till her parents resolved to grant her wish,
If they melted down plate, and goblet, and dish,
   The case was getting so serious.

CXVI

So a Leg was made in a comely mould,
Of gold, fine virgin glittering gold,
   As solid as man could make it—
Solid in foot, and calf, and shank,
A prodigious sum of money it sank;
In fact 'twas a Branch of the family Bank,
   And no easy matter to break it.

CXVII

All sterling metal—not half-and-half,
The Goldsmith's mark was stamp'd on the calf—
  'Twas pure as from Mexican barter!
And to make it more costly, just over the knee,
Where another ligature used to be,
Was a circle of jewels, worth shillings to see,
  A new-fangled Badge of the Garter!

CXVIII

'Twas a splendid, brilliant, beautiful Leg,
Fit for the Court of Scander-Beg,
That Precious Leg of Miss Kilmansegg!
  For, thanks to parental bounty,
Secure from Mortification's touch,
She stood on a Member that cost as much
  As a Member for all the County!

Her Fame

CXIX

To gratify stern ambition's whims,
What hundreds and thousands of precious limbs
  On a field of battle we scatter!
Sever'd by sword, or bullet, or saw,
Off they go, all bleeding and raw,—
But the public seems to get the lock-jaw,
  So little is said on the matter!

CXX

Legs, the tightest that ever were seen,
The tightest, the lightest, that danced on the green,
  Cutting capers to sweet Kitty Clover;
Shatter'd, scatter'd, cut, and bowl'd down,
Off they go, worse off for renown,
A line in the *Times*, or a talk about town,
  Than the leg that a fly runs over!

CXXI

But the Precious Leg of Miss Kilmansegg,
That gowden, goolden, golden leg,
Was the theme of all conversation!
Had it been a Pillar of Church and State,
Or a prop to support the whole Dead Weight,
It could not have furnish'd more debate
To the heads and tails of the nation!

CXXII

East and west, and north and south,
Though useless for either hunger or drouth,—
The Leg was in everybody's mouth,
To use a poetical figure,
Rumour, in taking her ravenous swim,
Saw, and seized on the tempting limb,
Like a shark on the leg of a nigger.

CXXIII

Wilful murder fell very dead;
Debates in the House were hardly read;
In vain the Police Reports were fed
With Irish riots and *rumpuses*—
The Leg! the Leg! was the great event,
Through every circle in life it went,
Like the leg of a pair of compasses.

CXXIV

The last new Novel seem'd tame and flat,
The Leg, a novelty newer than that,
Had tripp'd up the heels of Fiction!
It Burked the very essays of Burke,
And, alas! how Wealth over Wit plays the Turk!
As a regular piece of goldsmith's work,
Got the better of Goldsmith's diction.

CXXV

"A leg of gold! what, of solid gold?"
Cried rich and poor, and young and old,—
  And Master and Miss and Madam—
'Twas the talk of 'Change—the Alley—the Bank—
And with men of scientific rank,
It made as much stir as the fossil shank
  Of a Lizard coeval with Adam!

CXXVI

Of course with Greenwich and Chelsea elves,
Men who had lost a limb themselves,
  Its interest did not dwindle—
But Bill, and Ben, and Jack, and Tom
Could hardly have spun more yarns therefrom,
  If the leg had been a spindle.

CXXVII

Meanwhile the story went to and fro,
Till, gathering like the ball of snow,
By the time it got to Stratford-le-Bow,
  Through Exaggeration's touches,
The Heiress and Hope of the Kilmanseggs
Was propp'd on *two* fine Golden Legs,
  And a pair of Golden Crutches!

CXXVIII

Never had Leg so great a run!
'Twas the "go" and the "Kick" thrown into one!
The mode—the new thing under the sun,
  The rage—the fancy—the passion!
Bonnets were named, and hats were worn,
A la Golden Leg instead of Leghorn,
    And stockings and shoes,
      Of golden hues,
  Took the lead in the walks of fashion!

CXXIX

The Golden Leg had a vast career,
It was sung and danced—and to show how near
Low Folly to lofty approaches,
Down to society's very dregs,
The Belles of Wapping wore "Kilmanseggs,"
And St. Giles's Beaux sported Golden Legs
In their pinchbeck pins and brooches!

Her First Step

CXXX

Supposing the Trunk and Limbs of Man
Shared, on the allegorical plan,
By the Passions that mark Humanity,
Whichever might claim the head, or heart,
The stomach, or any other part,
The Legs would be seized by Vanity.

CXXXI

There's Bardus, a six-foot column of fop,
A lighthouse without any light atop,
Whose height would attract beholders,
If he had not lost some inches clear
By looking down at his kerseymere,
Ogling the limbs he holds so dear,
Till he got a stoop in his shoulders.

CXXXII

Talk of Art, of Science, or Books,
And down go the everlasting looks,
To his crural beauties so wedded!
Try him, wherever you will, you find
His mind in his legs, and his legs in his mind,
All prongs and folly—in short a kind
Of fork—that is Fiddle-headed.

CXXXIII

What wonder, then, if Miss Kilmansegg,
With a splendid, brilliant, beautiful leg,
Fit for the court of Scander-Beg,
Disdain'd to hide it like Joan or Meg,
  In petticoats stuff'd or quilted?
Not she! 'twas her convalescent whim
To dazzle the world with her precious limb,—
  Nay, to go a little high-kilted.

CXXXIV

So cards were sent for that sort of mob
Where Tartars and Africans hob-and-nob,
And the Cherokee talks of his cab and cob
  To Polish or Lapland lovers—
Cards like that hieroglyphical call
To a geographical Fancy Ball
  On the recent Post-Office covers.

CXXXV

For if Lion-hunters—and great ones too—
Would mob a savage from Latakoo,
Or squeeze for a glimpse of Prince Le Boo,
  That unfortunate Sandwich scion—
Hundreds of first-rate people, no doubt,
Would gladly, madly, rush to a rout
  That promised a Golden Lion!

Her Fancy Ball

CXXXVI

Of all the spirits of evil fame,
That hurt the soul or injure the frame,
And poison what's honest and hearty,
There's none more needs a Mathew to preach
A cooling, antiphlogistic speech,
To praise and enforce
A temperate course,
Than the Evil Spirit of Party.

CXXXVII

Go to the House of Commons, or Lords,
And they seem to be busy with simple words
In their popular sense or pedantic—
But, alas! with their cheers, and sneers, and jeers,
They're really busy, whatever appears,
Putting peas in each other's ears,
To drive their enemies frantic!

CXXXVIII

Thus Tories like to worry the Whigs,
Who treat them in turn like Schwalbach pigs,
Giving them lashes, thrashes, and digs,
With their writhing and pain delighted—
But after all that's said, and more,
The malice and spite of Party are poor
To the malice and spite of a party next door,
To a party not invited.

CXXXIX

On with the cap and out with the light,
Weariness bids the world good night,
At least for the usual season;
But hark! a clatter of horses' heels;
And Sleep and Silence are broken on wheels,
Like Wilful Murder and Treason!

CXL

Another crash—and the carriage goes—
Again poor Weariness seeks the repose
  That Nature demands, imperious;
But Echo takes up the burden now,
With a rattling chorus of row-de-dow-dow,
Till Silence herself seems making a row,
  Like a Quaker gone delirious!

CXLI

'Tis night—a winter night—and the stars
Are shining like winkin'—Venus and Mars
Are rolling along in their golden cars
  Through the sky's serene expansion—
But vainly the stars dispense their rays,
Venus and Mars are lost in the blaze
  Of the Kilmanseggs' luminous mansion!

CXLII

Up jumps Fear in a terrible fright!
His bedchamber windows look so bright,—
  With light all the Square is glutted!
Up he jumps, like a sole from the pan,
And a tremor sickens his inward man,
For he feels as only a gentleman can,
  Who thinks he's being "gutted."

CXLIII

Again Fear settles, all snug and warm;
But only to dream of a dreadful storm
  From Autumn's sulphurous locker;
But the only electrical body that falls
Wears a negative coat, and positive smalls,
And draws the peal that so appals
  From the Kilmanseggs' brazen knocker!

CXLIV

'Tis Curiosity's Benefit night—
And perchance 'tis the English Second-Sight,
But whatever it be, so be it—
As the friends and guests of Miss Kilmansegg
Crowd in to look at her Golden Leg,
As many more
Mob round the door,
To see them going to see it!

CXLV

In they go—in jackets and cloaks,
Plumes and bonnets, turbans and toques,
As if to a Congress of Nations:
Greeks and Malays, with daggers and dirks,
Spaniards, Jews, Chinese, and Turks—
Some like original foreign works,
But mostly like bad translations.

CXLVI

In they go, and to work like a pack,
Juan, Moses, and Shacabac,
Tom, and Jerry, and Springheel'd Jack,—
For some of low Fancy are lovers—
Skirting, zigzagging, casting about,
Here and there, and in and out,
With a crush, and a rush, for a full-bodied rout
In one of the stiffest of covers.

CXLVII

In they went, and hunted about,
Open-mouth'd like chub and trout,
And some with the upper lip thrust out,
Like that fish for routing, a barbel—
While Sir Jacob stood to welcome the crowd,
And rubb'd his hands, and smiled aloud,
And bow'd, and bow'd, and bow'd, and bow'd,
Like a man who is sawing marble.

CXLVIII

For Princes were there, and Noble Peers;
Dukes descended from Norman spears;
Earls that dated from early years;
And Lords in vast variety—
Besides the Gentry both new and old—
For people who stand on legs of gold
Are sure to stand well with society.

CXLIX

"But where—where—where?" with one accord,
Cried Moses and Mufti, Jack and my Lord,
Wang-Fong and Il Bondocani—
When slow, and heavy, and dead as a dump,
They heard a foot begin to stump,
Thump! lump!
Lump! thump!
Like the Spectre in "Don Giovanni"!

CL

And lo! the Heiress, Miss Kilmansegg,
With her splendid, brilliant, beautiful leg,
In the garb of a Goddess olden—
Like chaste Diana going to hunt,
With a golden spear—which of course was blunt,
And a tunic loop'd up to a gem in front,
To show the Leg that was Golden!

CLI

Gold! still gold; her Crescent behold,
That should be silver, but would be gold;
And her robe's auriferous spangles!
Her golden stomacher—how she would melt!
Her golden quiver, and golden belt,
Where a golden bugle dangles!

CLII

And her jewell'd Garter! Oh Sin, oh Shame!
Let Pride and Vanity bear the blame,
That bring such blots on female fame!
   But to be a true recorder,
Besides its thin transparent stuff,
The tunic was loop'd quite high enough
   To give a glimpse of the Order!

CLIII

But what have sin or shame to do
With a Golden Leg—and a stout one too?
   Away with all Prudery's panics!
That the precious metal, by thick and thin,
Will cover square acres of land or sin,
      Is a fact made plain
      Again and again,
   In Morals as well as Mechanics.

CLIV

A few, indeed, of her proper sex,
Who seem'd to feel her foot on their necks,
And fear'd their charms would meet with checks
   From so rare and splendid a blazon—
A few cried "fie!"—and "forward"—and "bold!"
And said of the Leg it might be gold,
   But to them it look'd like brazen!

CLV

'Twas hard they hinted for flesh and blood,
Virtue and Beauty, and all that's good,
   To strike to mere dross their topgallants—
But what were Beauty, or Virtue, or Worth,
Gentle manners, or gentle birth,
Nay, what the most talented head on earth
   To a Leg worth fifty Talents!

CLVI

But the men sang quite another hymn
Of glory and praise to the precious Limb—
Age, sordid Age, admired the whim
  And its indecorum pardon'd—
While half of the young—ay, more than half—
Bow'd down and worshipp'd the Golden Calf,
  Like the Jews when their hearts were harden'd.

CLVII

A Golden Leg!—what fancies it fired!
What golden wishes and hopes inspired!
  To give but a mere abridgment—
What a leg to leg-bail Embarrassment's serf!
What a leg for a Leg to take on the turf!
  What a leg for a marching regiment!

CLVIII

A Golden Leg!—whatever Love sings,
'Twas worth a bushel of "Plain Gold Rings"
  With which the Romantic wheedles.
'Twas worth all the legs in stockings and socks—
'Twas a leg that might be put in the Stocks,
  N.B.—Not the parish beadle's!

CLIX

And Lady K. nid-nodded her head,
Lapp'd in a turban fancy-bred,
Just like a love-apple huge and red,
  Some Mussul-womanish mystery;
    But whatever she meant
      To represent,
  She talk'd like the Muse of History.

CLX

She told how the filial leg was lost;
And then how much the gold one cost;
  With its weight to a Trojan fraction:

And how it took off, and how it put on;
And call'd on Devil, Duke, and Don,
Mahomet, Moses, and Prester John,
To notice its beautiful action.

CLXI

And then of the Leg she went in quest;
And led it where the light was best;
And made it lay itself up to rest
In postures for painter's studies:
It cost more tricks and trouble by half,
Than it takes to exhibit a six-legg'd Calf
To a boothful of country Cuddies.

CLXII

Nor yet did the Heiress herself omit
The arts that help to make a hit,
And preserve a prominent station.
She talk'd and laugh'd far more than her share;
And took a part in "Rich and Rare
Were the gems she wore"—and the gems were there,
Like a Song with an Illustration.

CLXIII

She even stood up with a Count of France
To dance—alas! the measures we dance
When Vanity plays the piper!
Vanity, Vanity, apt to betray,
And lead all sorts of legs astray,
Wood, or metal, or human clay,—
Since Satan first play'd the Viper!

CLXIV

But first she doff'd her hunting gear,
And favour'd Tom Tug with her golden spear
To row with down the river—
A Bonze had her golden bow to hold;
A Hermit her belt and bugle of gold;
And an Abbot her golden quiver.

CLXV

And then a space was clear'd on the floor,
And she walk'd the Minuet de la Cour,
With all the pomp of a Pompadour,
  But although she began *andante*,
Conceive the faces of all the Rout,
When she finished off with a whirligig bout,
And the Precious Leg stuck stiffly out
  Like the leg of a *Figuranté*.

CLXVI

So the courtly dance was goldenly done,
And golden opinions, of course, it won
  From all different sorts of people—
Chiming, ding-dong, with flattering phrase,
In one vociferous peal of praise,
Like the peal that rings on Royal days
  From Loyalty's parish steeple.

CLXVII

And yet, had the leg been one of those
That danced for bread in flesh-colour'd hose,
  With Rosina's pastoral bevy,
The jeers it had met,—the shouts! the scoff!
The cutting advice to "take itself off"
  For sounding but half so heavy.

CLXVIII

Had it been a leg like those, perchance,
That teach little girls and boys to dance,
To set, poussette, recede, and advance,
  With the steps and figures most proper,—
Had it hopp'd for a weekly or quarterly sum,
How little of praise or grist would have come
  To a mill with such a hopper!

CLXIX

But the Leg was none of those limbs forlorn—
Bartering capers and hops for corn—
That meet with public hisses and scorn,
Or the morning journal denounces—
Had it pleased to caper from morning till dusk,
There was all the music of "Money Musk"
In its ponderous bangs and bounces.

CLXX

But hark ;—as slow as the strokes of a pump,
Lump, thump!
Thump, lump!
As the Giant of Castle Otranto might stump,
To a lower room from an upper—
Down she goes with a noisy dint,
For, taking the crimson turban's hint,
A noble Lord at the Head of the Mint
Is leading the Leg to supper!

CLXXI

But the supper, alas! must rest untold,
With its blaze of light and its glitter of gold,
For to paint that scene of glamour,
It would need the Great Enchanter's charm,
Who waves over Palace, and Cot, and Farm,
An arm like the Goldbeater's Golden Arm
That wields a Golden Hammer.

CLXXII

He—only HE—could fitly state
THE MASSIVE SERVICE OF GOLDEN PLATE,
With the proper phrase and expansion—
The Rare Selection of FOREIGN WINES—
The ALPS OF ICE and MOUNTAINS OF PINES,
The punch in OCEANS and sugary shrines,
The TEMPLE OF TASTE from GUNTER'S DESIGNS—
In short, all that WEALTH with A FEAST combines,
In a SPLENDID FAMILY MANSION.

CLXXIII

Suffice it each mask'd outlandish guest
Ate and drank of the very best,
According to critical conners—
And then they pledged the Hostess and Host,
But the Golden Leg was the standing toast,
And as somebody swore,
Walk'd off with more
Than its share of the "Hips!" and honours!

CLXXIV

"Miss Kilmansegg!—
Full glasses I beg!—
Miss Kilmansegg and her Precious Leg!"
And away went the bottle careering!
Wine in bumpers! and shouts in peals!
Till the Clown didn't know his head from his heels,
The Mussulman's eyes danced two-some reels,
And the Quaker was hoarse with cheering!

Her Dream

CLXXV

Miss Kilmansegg took off her leg,
And laid it down like a cribbage-peg,
For the Rout was done and the riot:
The Square was hush'd; not a sound was heard;
The sky was gray, and no creature stirr'd,
Except one little precocious bird,
That chirp'd—and then was quiet.

CLXXVI

So still without,—so still within;—
It had been a sin
To drop a pin—
So intense is silence after a din,

It seem'd like Death's rehearsal!
To stir the air no eddy came;
And the taper burnt with as still a flame,
As to flicker had been a burning shame,
In a calm so universal.

CLXXVII

The time for sleep had come at last;
And there was the bed, so soft, so vast,
Quite a field of Bedfordshire clover;
Softer, cooler, and calmer, no doubt,
From the piece of work just ravell'd out,
For one of the pleasures of having a rout
Is the pleasure of having it over.

CLXXVIII

No sordid pallet, or truckle mean,
Of straw, and rug, and tatters unclean;
But a splendid, gilded, carved machine,
That was fit for a Royal Chamber.
On the top was a gorgeous golden wreath;
And the damask curtains hung beneath,
Like clouds of crimson and amber;

CLXXIX

Curtains, held up by two little plump things,
With golden bodies and golden wings,—
Mere fins for such solidities—
Two Cupids, in short,
Of the regular sort,
But the housemaid call'd them "Cupidities."

CLXXX

No patchwork quilt, all seams and scars,
But velvet, powder'd with golden stars,
A fit mantle for *Night*-Commanders!

And the pillow, as white as snow undimm'd
And as cool as the pool that the breeze has skimm'd,
Was cased in the finest cambric, and trimm'd
   With the costliest lace of Flanders.

CLXXXI

And the bed—of the Eider's softest down,
'Twas a place to revel, to smother, to drown
   In a bliss inferr'd by the Poet;
For if Ignorance be indeed a bliss,
What blessed ignorance equals this,
   To sleep—and not to know it?

CLXXXII

Oh bed! oh bed! delicious bed!
That heaven upon earth to the weary head;
But a place that to name would be ill-bred,
   To the head with a wakeful trouble—
'Tis held by such a different lease!
To one, a place of comfort and peace,
All stuff'd with the down of stubble geese,
   To another with only the stubble!

CLXXXIII

To one, a perfect Halcyon nest,
All calm, and balm and quiet, and rest,
   And soft as the fur of the cony—
To another, so restless for body and head,
That the bed seems borrow'd from Nettlebed,
   And the pillow from Stratford the Stony!

CLXXXIV

To the happy, a first-class carriage of ease,
To the Land of Nod, or where you please;
   But alas! for the watchers and weepers,
Who turn, and turn, and turn again,
But turn, and turn, and turn in vain,

With an anxious brain,
And thoughts in a train
That does not run upon *sleepers!*

CLXXXV

Wide awake as the mousing owl,
Night-hawk, or other nocturnal fowl,—
But more profitless vigils keeping,—
Wide awake in the dark they stare,
Filling with phantoms the vacant air,
As if that Crookback'd Tyrant Care
Had plotted to kill them sleeping.

CLXXXVI

And oh! when the blessed diurnal light
Is quench'd by the providential night,
To render our slumber more certain!
Pity, pity the wretches that weep,
For they must be wretched, who cannot sleep
When God himself draws the curtain!

CLXXXVII

The careful Betty the pillow beats,
And airs the blankets, and smooths the sheets,
And gives the mattress a shaking—
But vainly Betty performs her part,
If a ruffled head and a rumpled heart,
As well as the couch want making.

CLXXXVIII

There's Morbid, all bile, and verjuice, and nerves,
Where other people would make preserves,
He turns his fruits into pickles:
Jealous, envious, and fretful by day,
At night, to his own sharp fancies a prey,
He lies like a hedgehog roll'd up the wrong way,
Tormenting himself with his prickles.

CLXXXIX

But a child—that bids the world good night
In downright earnest and cuts it quite—
  A Cherub no Art can copy,—
'Tis a perfect picture to see him lie
As if he had supp'd on a dormouse pie,
(An ancient classical dish, by the bye)
  With a sauce of syrup of poppy.

CXC

Oh, bed! bed! bed! delicious bed!
That heaven upon earth to the weary head,
  Whether lofty or low its condition!
But instead of putting our plagues on shelves,
In our blankets how often we toss ourselves,
Or are toss'd by such allegorical elves
  As Pride, Hate, Greed, and Ambition!

CXCI

The independent Miss Kilmansegg
Took off her independent Leg
  And laid it beneath her pillow,
And then on the bed her frame she cast,
The time for repose had come at last,
But long, long, after the storm is past
  Rolls the turbid, turbulent billow.

CXCII

No part she had in vulgar cares
That belong to common household affairs—
Nocturnal annoyances such as theirs,
  Who lie with a shrewd surmising,
That while they are couchant (a bitter cup!)
Their bread and butter are getting up,
  And the coals, confound them, are rising.

CXCIII

No fear she had her sleep to postpone,
Like the crippled Widow who weeps alone,
And cannot make a doze her own,
For the dread that mayhap on the morrow,
The true and Christian reading to baulk,
A broker will take up her bed and walk,
By way of curing her sorrow.

CXCIV

No cause like these she had to bewail:
But the breath of applause had blown a gale,
And winds from that quarter seldom fail
To cause some human commotion;
But whenever such breezes coincide
With the very spring-tide
Of human pride,
There's no such swell on the ocean!

CXCV

Peace, and ease, and slumber lost,
She turn'd, and roll'd, and tumbled and toss'd,
With a tumult that would not settle:
A common case, indeed, with such
As have too little, or think too much,
Of the precious and glittering metal.

CXCVI

Gold!—she saw at her golden foot
The Peer whose tree had an olden root,
The Proud, the Great, the Learned to boot,
The handsome, the gay, and the witty—
The Man of Science—of Arms—of Art,
The man who deals but at Pleasure's mart,
And the man who deals in the City.

CXCVII

Gold, still gold—and true to the mould!
In the very scheme of her dream it told;
For, by magical transmutation,
From her Leg through her body it seem'd to go,
Till, gold above, and gold below,
She was gold, all gold, from her little gold toe
To her organ of Veneration!

CXCVIII

And still she retain'd through Fancy's art
The Golden Bow, and the Golden Dart,
With which she had play'd a Goddess's part
In her recent glorification:
And still, like one of the selfsame brood,
On a Plinth of the selfsame metal she stood
For the whole world's adoration.

CXCIX

And hymns and incense around her roll'd,
From Golden Harps and Censers of Gold,—
For Fancy in dreams is as uncontroll'd
As a horse without a bridle:
What wonder, then, from all checks exempt,
If, inspired by the Golden Leg, she dreamt
She was turn'd to a Golden Idol?

Her Courtship

CC

When leaving Eden's happy land
The grieving Angel led by the hand
Our banish'd Father and Mother,
Forgotten amid their awful doom,
The tears, the fears, and the future's gloom,
On each brow was a wreath of Paradise bloom,
That our Parents had twined for each other.

CCI

It was only while sitting like figures of stone,
For the grieving Angel had skyward flown,
As they sat, those Two in the world alone,
  With disconsolate hearts nigh cloven,
That scenting the gust of happier hours,
They look'd around for the precious flow'rs,
And lo!—a last relic of Eden's dear bow'rs—
  The chaplet that Love had woven!

CCII

And still, when a pair of Lovers meet,
There's a sweetness in air, unearthly sweet,
That savours still of that happy retreat
  Where Eve by Adam was courted:
Whilst the joyous Thrush, and the gentle Dove,
Woo'd their mates in the boughs above,
  And the Serpent, as yet, only sported.

CCIII

Who hath not felt that breath in the air,
A perfume and freshness strange and rare,
A warmth in the light, and a bliss everywhere,
  When young hearts yearn together?
All sweets below, and all sunny above,
Oh! there's nothing in life like making love,
  Save making hay in fine weather!

CCIV

Who hath not found amongst his flow'rs
A blossom too bright for this world of ours,
  Like a rose among snows of Sweden?
But to turn again to Miss Kilmansegg,
Where must Love have gone to beg,
If such a thing as a Golden Leg
  Had put its foot in Eden!

CCV

And yet—to tell the rigid truth—
Her favour was sought by Age and Youth—
For the prey will find a prowler!
She was follow'd, flatter'd, courted, address'd,
Woo'd, and coo'd, and wheedled, and press'd,
By suitors from North, South, East, and West,
Like that Heiress, in song, Tibbie Fowler!

CCVI

But, alas! alas! for the Woman's fate,
Who has from a mob to choose a mate!
'Tis a strange and painful mystery!
But the more the eggs, the worse the hatch;
The more the fish, the worse the catch;
The more the sparks, the worse the match;
Is a fact in Woman's history.

CCVII

Give her between a brace to pick,
And, mayhap, with luck to help the trick,
She will take the Faustus, and leave the Old Nick—
But her future bliss to baffle,
Amongst a score let her have a voice,
And she'll have as little cause to rejoice,
As if she had won the "Man of her choice"
In a matrimonial raffle!

CCVIII

Thus, even thus, with the Heiress and Hope,
Fulfilling the adage of too much rope,
With so ample a competition,
She chose the least worthy of all the group,
Just as the vulture makes a stoop,
And singles out from the herd or troop
The beast of the worst condition.

CCIX

A Foreign Count—who came incog.,
Not under a cloud, but under a fog,
In a Calais packet's fore-cabin,
To charm some lady British-born,
With his eyes as black as the fruit of the thorn,
And his hooky nose, and his beard half-shorn,
Like a half-converted Rabbin.

CCX

And because the Sex confess a charm
In the man who has slash'd a head or arm
Or has been a throat's undoing,
He was dress'd like one of the glorious trade,
At least when glory is off parade,
With a stock, and a frock, well trimm'd with braid,
And frogs—that went a-wooing.

CCXI

Moreover, as Counts are apt to do,
On the left-hand side of his dark surtout,
At one of those holes that buttons go through,
(To be a precise recorder,)
A ribbon he wore, or rather a scrap,
About an inch of ribbon mayhap,
That one of his rivals, a whimsical chap,
Described as his "Retail Order."

CCXII

And then—and much it help'd his chance—
He could sing, and play first fiddle, and dance,
Perform charades, and Proverbs of France—
Act the tender, and do the cruel;
For amongst his other killing parts,
He had broken a brace of female hearts,
And murder'd three men in duel!

CCXIII

Savage at heart, and false of tongue,
Subtle with age, and smooth to the young,
  Like a snake in his coiling and curling—
Such was the Count—to give him a niche—
Who came to court that Heiress rich,
And knelt at her foot—one needn't say which—
  Besieging her castle of *Sterling*.

CCXIV

With pray'rs and vows he open'd his trench,
And plied her with English, Spanish, and French
  In phrases the most sentimental:
And quoted poems in High and Low Dutch,
With now and then an Italian touch,
Till she yielded, without resisting much,
  To homage so continental.

CCXV

And then—the sordid bargain to close—
With a miniature sketch of his hooky nose,
And his dear dark eyes, as black as sloes,
And his beard and whiskers as black as those,
  The lady's consent he requited—
And instead of the lock that lovers beg,
The Count received from Miss Kilmansegg
A model, in small, of her Precious Leg—
  And so the couple were plighted!

CCXVI

But, oh! the love that gold must crown!
Better—better, the love of the clown,
Who admires his lass in her Sunday gown,
  As if all the fairies had dress'd her!
Whose brain to no crooked thought gives birth,
Except that he never will part on earth
  With his true love's crooked tester!

CCXVII

Alas! for the love that's link'd with gold!
Better—better a thousand times told—
More honest, happy, and laudable,
The downright loving of pretty Cis,
Who wipes her lips, though there's nothing amiss,
And takes a kiss, and gives a kiss,
In which her heart is audible!

CCXVIII

Pretty Cis, so smiling and bright,
Who loves—as she labours—with all her might,
And without any sordid leaven!
Who blushes as red as haws and hips,
Down to her very finger-tips,
For Roger's blue ribbons—to her, like strips
Cut out of the azure of Heaven!

Her Marriage

CCXIX

'Twas morn—a most auspicious one!
From the Golden East, the Golden Sun
Came forth his glorious race to run,
Through clouds of most splendid tinges;
Clouds that lately slept in shade,
But now seem'd made
Of gold brocade,
With magnificent golden fringes.

CCXX

Gold above, and gold below,
The earth reflected the golden glow,
From river, and hill, and valley;

Gilt by the golden light of morn,
The Thames—it look'd like the Golden Horn,
And the Barge, that carried coal or corn,
Like Cleopatra's Galley!

CCXXI

Bright as clusters of Golden-rod,
Suburban poplars began to nod,
With extempore splendour furnish'd;
While London was bright with glittering clocks,
Golden dragons, and Golden cocks,
And above them all,
The dome of St. Paul,
With its Golden Cross and its Golden Ball,
Shone out as if newly burnish'd!

CCXXII

And lo! for Golden Hours and Joys,
Troops of glittering Golden Boys
Danced along with a jocund noise,
And their gilded emblems carried!
In short, 'twas the year's most Golden Day,
By mortals call'd the First of May,
When Miss Kilmansegg,
Of the Golden Leg,
With a Golden Ring was married!

CCXXIII

And thousands of children, women, and men,
Counted the clock from eight till ten,
From St. James's sonorous steeple;
For next to that interesting job,
The hanging of Jack, or Bill, or Bob,
There's nothing so draws a London mob
As the noosing of very rich people.

CCXXIV

And a treat it was for the mob to behold
The Bridal Carriage that blazed with gold!
And the Footmen tall and the Coachman bold,
  In liveries so resplendent—
Coats you wonder'd to see in place,
They seem'd so rich with golden lace,
  That they might have been independent.

CCXXV

Coats, that made those menials proud
Gaze with scorn on the dingy crowd,
  From their gilded elevations;
Not to forget that saucy lad
(Ostentation's favourite cad),
The Page, who look'd, so splendidly clad,
  Like a Page of the "Wealth of Nations."

CCXXVI

But the Coachman carried off the state,
With what was a Lancashire body of late
  Turn'd into a Dresden Figure;
With a bridal Nosegay of early bloom,
About the size of a birchen broom,
And so huge a White Favour, had Gog been Groom
  He need not have worn a bigger.

CCXXVII

And then to see the Groom! the Count!
With Foreign Orders to such an amount,
  And whiskers so wild—nay, bestial;
He seem'd to have borrow'd the shaggy hair
As well as the Stars of the Polar Bear,
  To make him look celestial!

CCXXVIII

And then—Great Jove!—the struggle, the crush,
The screams, the heaving, the awful rush,
  The swearing, the tearing, and fighting,—
The hats and bonnets smash'd like an egg—
To catch a glimpse of the Golden Leg,
Which, between the steps and Miss Kilmansegg,
  Was fully display'd in alighting!

CCXXIX

From the Golden Ankle up to the Knee
There it was for the mob to see!
A shocking act had it chanced to be
  A crooked leg or a skinny:
But although a magnificent veil she wore,
Such as never was seen before,
In case of blushes, she blush'd no more
  Than George the First on a guinea!

CCXXX

Another step, and lo! she was launched!
All in white, as Brides are *blanched*,
  With a wreath of most wonderful splendour—
Diamonds, and pearls, so rich in device,
That, according to calculation nice,
Her head was worth as royal a price
  As the head of the Young Pretender.

CCXXXI

Bravely she shone—and shone the more
As she sail'd through the crowd of squalid and poor,
  Thief, beggar, and tatterdemalion—
Led by the Count, with his sloe-black eyes
Bright with triumph, and some surprise,
Like Anson on making sure of his prize
  The famous Mexican Galleon!

CCXXXII

Anon came Lady K., with her face
Quite made up to act with grace,
But she cut the performance shorter;
For instead of pacing stately and stiff,
At the stare of the vulgar she took a miff,
And ran, full speed, into Church, as if
To get married before her daughter.

CCXXXIII

But Sir Jacob walk'd more slowly, and bow'd
Right and left to the gaping crowd,
Wherever a glance was seizable;
For Sir Jacob thought he bow'd like a Guelph,
And therefore bow'd to imp and elf,
And would gladly have made a bow to himself,
Had such a bow been feasible.

CCXXXIV

And last—and not the least of the sight,
Six "Handsome Fortunes," all in white,
Came to help in the marriage rite,—
And rehearse their own hymeneals;
And then the bright procession to close,
They were followed by just as many Beaux
Quite fine enough for Ideals.

CCXXXV

Glittering men, and splendid dames,
Thus they enter'd the porch of St. James',
Pursued by a thunder of laughter;
For the Beadle was forced to intervene,
For Jim the Crow, and his Mayday Queen,
With her gilded ladle, and Jack i' the Green,
Would fain have follow'd after!

CCXXXVI

Beadle-like he hush'd the shout;
But the temple was full "inside and out,"
And a buzz kept buzzing all round about
  Like bees when the day is sunny—
A buzz universal, that interfered
With the rite that ought to have been revered,
As if the couple already were smear'd
  With Wedlock's treacle and honey!

CCXXXVII

Yet Wedlock's a very awful thing!
'Tis something like that feat in the ring,
  Which requires good nerve to do it—
When one of a "Grand Equestrian Troop"
Makes a jump at a gilded hoop,
    Not certain at all
    Of what may befall
  After his getting through it!

CCXXXVIII

But the Count he felt the nervous work
No more than any polygamous Turk,
  Or bold piratical skipper,
Who, during his buccaneering search,
Would as soon engage a hand in church
  As a hand on board his clipper!

CCXXXIX

And how did the Bride perform her part?
Like any bride who is cold at heart.
  Mere snow with the ice's glitter;
What but a life of winter for her!
Bright but chilly, alive without stir,
So splendidly comfortless,—just like a Fir
  When the frost is severe and bitter.

CCXL

Such were the future man and wife!
Whose bale or bliss to the end of life
A few short words were to settle—
"Wilt thou have this woman?"
"I will"—and then,
"Wilt thou have this man?"
"I will," and "Amen"—
And those Two were one Flesh, in the Angels' ken,
Except one Leg—that was metal.

CCXLI

Then the names were sign'd—and kiss'd the kiss:
And the Bride, who came from her coach a Miss,
As a Countess walk'd to her carriage—
Whilst Hymen preen'd his plumes like a dove,
And Cupid flutter'd his wings above,
In the shape of a fly—as little a Love
As ever look'd in at a marriage!

CCXLII

Another crash—and away they dash'd,
And the gilded carriage and footmen flash'd
From the eyes of the gaping people—
Who turn'd to gaze at the toe-and-heel
Of the Golden Boys beginning a reel,
To the merry sound of a wedding peal
From St. James's musical steeple.

CCXLIII

Those wedding bells! those wedding bells!
How sweetly they sound in pastoral dells
From a tow'r in an ivy-green jacket!
But town-made joys how dearly they cost;
And after all are tumbled and tost,
Like a peal from a London steeple, and lost
In town-made riot and racket.

CCXLIV

The wedding peal, how sweetly it peals
With grass or heather beneath our heels,—
  For bells are Music's laughter!—
But a London peal, well mingled, be sure,
With vulgar noises and voices impure,—
What a harsh and discordant overture
  To the Harmony meant to come after!

CCXLV

But hence with Discord—perchance, too soon
To cloud the face of the honeymoon
  With a dismal occultation!—
Whatever Fate's concerted trick,
The Countess and Count, at the present nick,
Have a chicken, and not a crow, to pick
  At a sumptuous Cold Collation.

CCXLVI

A Breakfast—no unsubstantial mess,
But one in the style of Good Queen Bess,
  Who,—hearty as hippocampus,—
Broke her fast with ale and beef,
Instead of toast and the Chinese leaf,
  And—in lieu of anchovy—grampus.

CCXLVII

A breakfast of fowl, and fish, and flesh,
Whatever was sweet, or salt, or fresh;
  With wines the most rare and curious—
Wines, of the richest flavour and hue;
With fruits from the worlds both Old and New;
And fruits obtain'd before they were due
  At a discount most usurious.

CCXLVIII

For wealthy palates there be, that scout
What is *in* season, for what is *out*,
  And prefer all precocious savour:

For instance, early green peas, of the sort
That costs some four or five guineas a quart;
Where the *Mint* is the principal flavour.

CCXLIX

And many a wealthy man was there,
Such as the wealthy City could spare,
To put in a portly appearance—
Men, whom their fathers had help'd to gild:
And men, who had had their fortunes to build
And—much to their credit—had richly fill'd
Their purses by *pursy-verance.*

CCL

Men, by popular rumour at least,
Not the last to enjoy a feast!
And truly they were not idle!
Luckier far than the chestnut tits,
Which, down at the door, stood champing their bits,
At a different sort of bridle.

CCLI

For the time was come—and the whisker'd Count
Help'd his Bride in the carriage to mount,
And fain would the Muse deny it,
But the crowd, including two butchers in blue,
(The regular killing Whitechapel hue,)
Of her Precious Calf had as ample a view,
As if they had come to buy it!

CCLII

Then away! away! with all the speed
That golden spurs can give to the steed,—
Both Yellow Boys and Guineas, indeed,
Concurr'd to urge the cattle—
Away they went, with favours white,
Yellow jackets, and panels bright,
And left the mob, like a mob at night,
Agape at the sound of a rattle.

CCLIII

Away! away! they rattled and roll'd,
The Count, and his Bride, and her Leg of Gold—
  That faded charm to the charmer!
Away,—through old Brentford rang the din
Of wheels and heels, on their way to win
That hill, named after one of her kin,
  The Hill of the Golden Farmer!

CCLIV

Gold, still gold—it flew like dust!
It tipp'd the post-boy, and paid the trust;
In each open palm it was freely thrust;
  There was nothing but giving and taking!
And if gold could ensure the future hour,
What hopes attended that Bride to her bow'r,
But alas! even hearts with a four-horse pow'r
  Of opulence end in breaking!

Her Honeymoon

CCLV

The moon—the moon, so silver and cold,
Her fickle temper has oft been told,
  Now shady—now bright and sunny—
But of all the lunar things that change,
The one that shows most fickle and strange,
And takes the most eccentric range,
  Is the moon—so call'd—of honey!

CCLVI

To some a full-grown orb reveal'd,
As big and as round as Norval's shield,
  And as bright as a burner Bude-lighted;
To others as dull, and dingy, and damp,
As any oleaginous lamp,

Of the regular old parochial stamp,
In a London fog benighted.

CCLVII

To the loving, a bright and constant sphere,
That makes earth's commonest things appear
All poetic, romantic, and tender:
Hanging with jewels a cabbage-stump,
And investing a common post, or a pump,
A currant-bush, or a gooseberry clump,
With a halo of dreamlike splendour.

CCLVIII

A sphere such as shone from Italian skies,
In Juliet's dear, dark, liquid eyes,
Tipping trees with its argent braveries—
And to couples not favour'd with Fortune's boons
One of the most delightful of moons,
For it brightens their pewter platters and spoons
Like a silver service of Savory's!

CCLIX

For all is bright, and beauteous, and clear,
And the meanest thing most precious and dear
When the magic of love is present:
Love, that lends a sweetness and grace
To the humblest spot and the plainest face—
That turns Wilderness Row into Paradise Place,
And Garlick Hill to Mount Pleasant!

CCLX

Love that sweetens sugarless tea,
And makes contentment and joy agree
With the coarsest boarding and bedding:
Love, that no golden ties can attach,
But nestles under the humblest thatch,
And will fly away from an Emperor's match
To dance at a Penny Wedding!

CCLXI

Oh, happy, happy, thrice happy state,
When such a bright Planet governs the fate
   Of a pair of united lovers!
'Tis theirs, in spite of the Serpent's hiss,
To enjoy the pure primeval kiss,
With as much of the old original bliss
   As mortality ever recovers!

CCLXII

There's strength in double joints, no doubt,
In double X Ale, and Dublin Stout,
That the single sorts know nothing about—
   And a fist is strongest when doubled—
And double aqua-fortis, of course,
And double soda-water, perforce,
   Are the strongest that ever bubbled!

CCLXIII

There's double beauty whenever a Swan
Swims on a Lake, with her double thereon;
And ask the gardener, Luke or John,
   Of the beauty of double-blowing—
A double dahlia delights the eye;
And it's far the loveliest sight in the sky
   When a double rainbow is glowing!

CCLXIV

There's warmth in a pair of double soles;
As well as a double allowance of coals—
   In a coat that is double-breasted—
In double windows and double doors;
And a double U wind is blest by scores
   For its warmth to the tender-chested.

CCLXV

There's a twofold sweetness in double pipes;
And a double barrel and double snipes
   Give the sportsman a duplicate pleasure:
There's double safety in double locks;
And double letters bring cash for the box;
And all the world knows that double knocks
   Are gentility's double measure.

CCLXVI

There's a double sweetness in double rhymes,
And a double at Whist and a double Times
   In profit are certainly double—
By doubling, the Hare contrives to escape;
And all seamen delight in a doubled Cape,
   And a double-reef'd topsail in trouble.

CCLXVII

There's a double chuck at a double chin,
And of course there's a double pleasure therein,
   If the parties were brought to telling:
And however our Dennises take offence,
A double meaning shows double sense;
         And if proverbs tell truth,
         A double tooth
   Is Wisdom's adopted dwelling!

CCLXVIII

But double wisdom, and pleasure, and sense,
Beauty, respect, strength, comfort, and thence
   Through whatever the list discovers,
They are all in the double blessedness summ'd,
Of what was formerly double-drumm'd,
   The Marriage of two true Lovers!

CCLXIX

Now the Kilmansegg Moon,—it must be told—
Though instead of silver it tipp'd with gold—
Shone rather wan, and distant, and cold,
  And before its days were at thirty,
Such gloomy clouds began to collect,
With an ominous ring of ill effect,
As gave but too much cause to expect
  Such weather as seamen call dirty!

CCLXX

And yet the moon was the "Young May Moon,"
And the scented hawthorn had blossom'd soon,
  And the thrush and the blackbird were singing—
The snow-white lambs were skipping in play,
And the bee was humming a tune all day
To flowers, as welcome as flowers in May,
  And the trout in the stream was springing!

CCLXXI

But what were the hues of the blooming earth,
Its scents—its sounds—or the music and mirth
  Of its furr'd or its feather'd creatures,
To a Pair in the world's last sordid stage,
Who had never look'd into Nature's page,
And had strange ideas of a Golden Age,
  Without any Arcadian features?

CCLXXII

And what were joys of the pastoral kind
To a Bride—town-made—with a heart and a mind
  With simplicity ever at battle?
A bride of an ostentatious race,
Who, thrown in the Golden Farmer's place,
Would have trimm'd her shepherds with golden lace,
  And gilt the horns of her cattle.

CCLXXIII

She could not please the pigs with her whim,
And the sheep wouldn't cast their eyes at a limb
For which she had been such a martyr:
The deer in the park, and the colts at grass,
And the cows unheeded let it pass;
And the ass on the common was such an ass,
That he wouldn't have swopp'd
The thistle he cropp'd
For her Leg, including the Garter!

CCLXXIV

She hated lanes and she hated fields—
She hated all that the country yields—
And barely knew turnips from clover;
She hated walking in any shape,
And a country stile was an awkward scrape,
Without the bribe of a mob to gape
At the Leg in clambering over!

CCLXXV

O blessed nature, "O rus! O rus!"
Who cannot sigh for the country thus,
Absorb'd in a worldly torpor—
Who does not yearn for its meadow-sweet breath,
Untainted by care, and crime, and death,
And to stand sometimes upon grass or heath—
That soul, spite of gold, is a pauper!

CCLXXVI

But to hail the pearly advent of morn,
And relish the odour fresh from the thorn,
She was far too pamper'd a madam—
Or to joy in the daylight waxing strong,
While, after ages of sorrow and wrong,
The scorn of the proud, the misrule of the strong,
And all the woes that to man belong,
The Lark still carols the selfsame song
That he did to the uncurst Adam!

CCLXXVII

The Lark! she had given all Leipzig's flocks
For a Vauxhall tune in a musical box;
And as for the birds in the thicket,
Thrush or ousel in leafy niche,
The linnet or finch, she was far too rich
To care for a Morning Concert, to which
She was welcome without any ticket.

CCLXXVIII

Gold, still gold, her standard of old,
All pastoral joys were tried by gold,
Or by fancies golden and crural—
Till ere she had pass'd one week unblest,
As her agricultural Uncle's guest,
Her mind was made up, and fully imprest,
That felicity could not be rural!

CCLXXIX

And the Count?—to the snow-white lambs at play,
And all the scents and the sights of May,
And the birds that warbled their passion,
His ears and dark eyes, and decided nose,
Were as deaf and as blind and as dull as those
That overlook the Bouquet de Rose,
The Huile Antique,
And Parfum Unique,
In a Barber's Temple of Fashion.

CCLXXX

To tell, indeed, the true extent
Of his rural bias, so far it went
As to covet estates in ring fences—
And for rural lore he had learn'd in town
That the country was green, turn'd up with brown,
And garnish'd with trees that a man might cut down
Instead of his own expenses.

CCLXXXI

And yet had that fault been his only one,
The Pair might have had few quarrels or none,
For their tastes thus far were in common;
But faults he had that a haughty bride
With a Golden Leg could hardly abide—
Faults that would even have roused the pride
Of a far less metalsome woman!

CCLXXXII

It was early days indeed for a wife,
In the very spring of her married life,
To be chill'd by its wintry weather—
But instead of sitting as Love-Birds do,
On Hymen's turtles that bill and coo—
Enjoying their "moon and honey for two,"
They were scarcely seen together!

CCLXXXIII

In vain she sat with her Precious Leg
A little exposed, *à la* Kilmansegg,
And roll'd her eyes in their sockets!
He left her in spite of her tender regards,
And those loving murmurs described by bards,
For the rattling of dice and the shuffling of cards,
And the poking of balls into pockets!

CCLXXXIV

Moreover he loved the deepest stake
And the heaviest bets the players would make;
And he drank—the reverse of sparely,—
And he used strange curses that made her fret;
And when he play'd with herself at piquet,
She found, to her cost,
For she always lost,
That the Count did not count quite fairly.

CCLXXXV

And then came dark mistrust and doubt,
Gather'd by worming his secrets out,
And slips in his conversations—
Fears, which all her peace destroy'd,
That his title was null—his coffers were void—
And his French Château was in Spain, or enjoy'd
The most airy of situations.

CCLXXXVI

But still his heart—if he had such a part—
She—only she—might possess his heart,
And hold his affections in fetters—
Alas! that hope, like a crazy ship,
Was forced its anchor and cable to slip
When, seduced by her fears, she took a dip
In his private papers and letters.

CCLXXXVII

Letters that told of dangerous leagues;
And notes that hinted as many intrigues
As the Count's in the "Barber of Seville"—
In short such mysteries came to light,
That the Countess-Bride, on the thirtieth night,
Woke and started up in affright,
And kick'd and scream'd with all her might,
And finally fainted away outright,
For she dreamt she had married the Devil!

Her Misery

CCLXXXVIII

Who hath not met with home-made bread,
A heavy compound of putty and lead—
And home-made wines that rack the head,
   And home-made liqueurs and waters?
Home-made pop that will not foam,
And home-made dishes that drive one from home,
         Not to name each mess,
         For the face or dress,
   Home-made by the homely daughters?

CCLXXXIX

Home-made physic that sickens the sick;
Thick for thin and thin for thick;—
In short each homogeneous trick
   For poisoning domesticity?
And since our Parents, call'd the First,
A little family squabble nurst,
Of all our evils the worst of the worst
   Is home-made infelicity.

CCXC

There's a Golden Bird that claps its wings,
And dances for joy on its perch, and sings
   With a Persian exultation:
For the Sun is shining into the room,
And brightens up the carpet-bloom,
As if it were new, bran new, from the loom,
   Or the lone Nun's fabrication.

CCXCI

And thence the glorious radiance flames
On pictures in massy gilded frames—
Enshrining, however, no painted Dames,
   But portraits of colts and fillies—

Pictures hanging on walls, which shine,
In spite of the bard's familiar line,
With clusters of "Gilded lilies."

CCXCII

And still the flooding sunlight shares
Its lustre with gilded sofas and chairs,
That shine as if freshly burnish'd—
And gilded tables, with glittering stocks
Of gilded china, and golden clocks,
Toy, and trinket, and musical box,
That Peace and Paris have furnish'd.

CCXCIII

And lo! with the brightest gleam of all
The glowing sunbeam is seen to fall
On an object as rare as splendid—
The golden foot of the Golden Leg
Of the Countess—once Miss Kilmansegg—
But there all sunshine is ended.

CCXCIV

Her cheek is pale, and her eye is dim,
And downward cast, yet not at the limb,
Once the centre of all speculation;
But downward drooping in comfort's dearth,
As gloomy thoughts are drawn to the earth—
Whence human sorrows derive their birth—
By a moral gravitation.

CCXCV

Her golden hair is out of its braids,
And her sighs betray the gloomy shades
That her evil planet revolves in—
And tears are falling that catch a gleam
So bright as they drop in the sunny beam,
That tears of *aqua regia* they seem,
The water that gold dissolves in;

CCXCVI

Yet, not in filial grief were shed
Those tears for a mother's insanity;
Nor yet because her father was dead,
For the bowing Sir Jacob had bow'd his head
To Death—with his usual urbanity;
The waters that down her visage rill'd
Were drops of unrectified spirit distill'd
From the limbeck of Pride and Vanity.

CCXCVII

Tears that fell alone and uncheckt,
Without relief, and without respect,
Like the fabled pearls that the pigs neglect,
When pigs have that opportunity—
And of all the griefs that mortals share,
The one that seems the hardest to bear
Is the grief without community.

CCXCVIII

How bless'd the heart that has a friend
A sympathising ear to lend
To troubles too great to smother!
For as ale and porter, when flat, are restored
Till a sparkling bubbling head they afford,
So sorrow is cheer'd by being pour'd
From one vessel into another.

CCXCIX

But friend or gossip she had not one
To hear the vile deeds that the Count had done,
How night after night he rambled;
And how she had learn'd by sad degrees
That he drank, and smoked, and worse than these,
That he "swindled, intrigued, and gambled."

CCC

How he kiss'd the maids, and sparr'd with John;
And came to bed with his garments on;
With other offences as heinous—
And brought *strange* gentlemen home to dine,
That he said were in the Fancy Line,
And they fancied spirits instead of wine,
And call'd her lap-dog "Wenus."

CCCI

Of "making a book" how he made a stir,
But never had written a line to her,
Once his idol and Cara Sposa:
And how he had storm'd, and treated her ill,
Because she refused to go down to a mill,
She didn't know where, but remember'd still
That the Miller's name was Mendoza.

CCCII

How often he waked her up at night,
And oftener still by the morning light,
Reeling home from his haunts unlawful;
Singing songs that shouldn't be sung,
Except by beggars and thieves unhung—
Or volleying oaths, that a foreign tongue
Made still more horrid and awful!

CCCIII

How oft, instead of otto of rose,
With vulgar smells he offended her nose,
From gin, tobacco, and onion!
And then how wildly he used to stare!
And shake his fist at nothing, and swear,—
And pluck by the handful his shaggy hair,
Till he look'd like a study of Giant Despair
For a new Edition of Bunyan!

CCCIV

For dice will run the contrary way,
As well is known to all who play,
And cards will conspire as in treason:
And what with keeping a hunting-box,
Following fox—
Friends in flocks,
Burgundies, Hocks,
From London Docks;
Stultz's frocks,
Manton and Nock's
Barrels and locks,
Shooting blue rocks,
Trainers and jocks,
Buskins and socks,
Pugilistical knocks,
And fighting-cocks,
If he found himself short in funds and stocks,
These rhymes will furnish the reason!

CCCV

His friends, indeed, were falling away—
Friends who insist on play or pay—
And he fear'd at no very distant day
To be cut by Lord and by cadger,
As one, who has gone, or is going, to smash,
For his checks no longer drew the cash,
Because, as his comrades explain'd in flash.
"He had overdrawn his badger."

CCCVI

Gold, gold—alas! for the gold
Spent where souls are bought and sold,
In Vice's Walpurgis revel!
Alas! for muffles, and bulldogs, and guns,
The leg that walks, and the leg that runs,

All real evils, though Fancy ones,
When they lead to debt, dishonour, and duns,
Nay, to death, and perchance the devil!

CCCVII

Alas! for the last of a Golden race!
Had she cried her wrongs in the market-place,
She had warrant for all her clamour—
For the worst of rogues, and brutes, and rakes,
Was breaking her heart by constant aches,
With as little remorse as the Pauper, who breaks
A flint with a parish hammer!

Her Last Will

CCCVIII

Now the Precious Leg while cash was flush,
Or the Count's acceptance worth a rush,
Had never created dissension;
But no sooner the stocks began to fall,
Than, without any ossification at all,
The limb became what people call
A perfect bone of contention.

CCCIX

For alter'd days brought alter'd ways,
And instead of the complimentary phrase,
So current before her bridal—
The Countess heard, in language low,
That her Precious Leg was precious slow,
A good 'un to look at but bad to go,
And kept quite a sum lying idle.

CCCX

That instead of playing musical airs,
Like Colin's foot in going upstairs—

As the wife in the Scottish ballad declares—
   It made an infernal stumping.
Whereas a member of cork, or wood,
Would be lighter and cheaper and quite as good,
   Without the unbearable thumping.

CCCXI

P'raps she thought it a decent thing
To show her calf to cobbler and king,
   But nothing could be absurder—
While none but the crazy would advertise
Their gold before their servants' eyes,
Who of course some night would make it a prize,
   By a Shocking and Barbarous Murder.

CCCXII

But spite of hint, and threat, and scoff,
   The Leg kept its situation:
For legs are not to be taken off
   By a verbal amputation.
And mortals when they take a whim,
The greater the folly the stiffer the limb
   That stand upon it or by it—
So the Countess, then Miss Kilmansegg,
At her marriage refused to stir a peg,
Till the Lawyers had fasten'd on her Leg
   As fast as the Law could tie it.

CCCXIII

Firmly then—and more firmly yet—
With scorn for scorn, and with threat for threat,
   The Proud One confronted the Cruel:
And loud and bitter the quarrel arose,
Fierce and merciless—one of those,
With spoken daggers, and looks like blows,
   In all but the bloodshed a duel!

CCCXIV

Rash, and wild, and wretched, and wrong,
Were the words that came from Weak and Strong,
  Till madden'd for desperate matters,
Fierce as tigress escaped from her den,
She flew to her desk—'twas open'd—and then,
In the time it takes to try a pen,
Or the clerk to utter his slow Amen,
  Her Will was in fifty tatters!

CCCXV

But the Count, instead of curses wild,
Only nodded his head and smiled,
As if at the spleen of an angry child;
  But the calm was deceitful and sinister!
A lull like the lull of the treacherous sea—
For Hate in that moment had sworn to be
The Golden Leg's sole Legatee,
  And that very night to administer!

Her Death

CCCXVI

'Tis a stern and startling thing to think
How often mortality stands on the brink
  Of its grave without any misgiving:
And yet in this slippery world of strife,
In the stir of human bustle so rife,
There are daily sounds to tell us that Life
  Is dying, and Death is living!

CCCXVII

Ay, Beauty the Girl, and Love the Boy,
Bright as they are with hope and joy,
  How their souls would sadden instanter,

To remember that one of those wedding bells,
Which ring so merrily through the dells,
Is the same that knells
Our last farewells,
Only broken into a canter!

CCCXVIII

But breath and blood set doom at nought—
How little the wretched Countess thought,
When at night she unloosed her sandal,
That the Fates had woven her burial-cloth,
And that Death, in the shape of a Death's Head Moth,
Was fluttering round her candle!

CCCXIX

As she look'd at her clock of or-molu,
For the hours she had gone so wearily through
At the end of a day of trial—
How little she saw in her pride of prime
The dart of Death in the Hand of Time—
That hand which moved on the dial!

CCCXX

As she went with her taper up the stair,
How little her swollen eye was aware
That the Shadow which follow'd was double!
Or when she closed her chamber door,
It was shutting out, and for evermore,
The world—and its worldly trouble.

CCCXXI

Little she dreamt, as she laid aside
Her jewels—after one glance of pride—
They were solemn bequests to Vanity—
Or when her robes she began to doff,
That she stood so near to the putting off
Of the flesh that clothes humanity.

CCCXXII

And when she quench'd the taper's light,
How little she thought as the smoke took flight,
That her day was done—and merged in a night
Of dreams and duration uncertain—
Or along with her own,
That a Hand of Bone
Was closing mortality's curtain !

CCCXXIII

But life is sweet, and mortality blind,
And youth is hopeful, and Fate is kind
In concealing the day of sorrow ;
And enough is the present tense of toil—
For this world is, to all, a stiffish soil—
And the mind flies back with a glad recoil
From the debts not due till to-morrow.

CCCXXIV

Wherefore else does the Spirit fly
And bid its daily cares good-bye,
Along with its daily clothing?
Just as the felon condemn'd to die—
With a very natural loathing—
Leaving the Sheriff to dream of ropes,
From his gloomy cell in a vision elopes
To a caper on sunny gleams and slopes,
Instead of a dance upon nothing.

CCCXXV

Thus, even thus, the Countess slept,
While Death still nearer and nearer crept,
Like the Thane who smote the sleeping—
But her mind was busy with early joys,
Her golden treasures and golden toys ;
That flash'd a bright
And golden light
Under lids still red with weeping.

CCCXXVI

The golden doll that she used to hug!
Her coral of gold, and the golden mug!
Her godfather's golden presents!
The golden service she had at her meals,
The golden watch, and chain, and seals,
Her golden scissors, and thread, and reels,
And her golden fishes and pheasants!

CCCXXVII

The golden guineas in silken purse—
And the Golden Legends she heard from her nurse
Of the Mayor in his gilded carriage—
And London streets that were paved with gold—
And the Golden Eggs that were laid of old—
With each golden thing
To the golden ring
At her own auriferous Marriage!

CCCXXVIII

And still the golden light of the sun
Through her golden dream appear'd to run,
Though the night, that roared without, was one
To terrify seamen or gypsies—
While the moon, as if in malicious mirth,
Kept peeping down at the ruffled earth,
As though she enjoy'd the tempest's birth,
In revenge of her old eclipses.

CCCXXIX

But vainly, vainly, the thunder fell,
For the soul of the Sleeper was under a spell
That time had lately embitter'd—
The Count, as once at her foot he knelt—
That foot, which now he wanted to melt!
But—hush!—'twas a stir at her pillow she felt—
And some object before her glitter'd.

CCCXXX

'Twas the Golden Leg !—she knew its gleam !
And up she started and tried to scream,—
  But ev'n in the moment she started
Down came the limb with a frightful smash,
And, lost in the universal flash
That her eyeballs made at so mortal a crash,
  The Spark, call'd Vital, departed !

* * * * *

CCCXXXI

Gold, still gold ! hard, yellow, and cold,
For gold she had lived, and she died for gold—
  By a golden weapon—not oaken ;
In the morning they found her all alone—
Stiff, and bloody, and cold as stone—
But her Leg, the Golden Leg, was gone,
  And the "Golden Bowl was broken !"

CCCXXXII

Gold—still gold ! it haunted her yet—
At the Golden Lion the Inquest met—
  Its foreman, a carver and gilder—
And the Jury debated from twelve till three
What the Verdict ought to be,
And they brought it in as Felo de Se,
  "Because her own Leg had kill'd her !"

Her Moral

Gold! Gold! Gold! Gold!
Bright and yellow, hard and cold,
Molten, graven, hammer'd and roll'd;
Heavy to get, and light to hold;
Hoarded, barter'd, bought, and sold,
Stolen, borrow'd, squander'd, doled:
Spurn'd by the young, but hugg'd by the old
To the very verge of the churchyard mould;
Price of many a crime untold;
Gold! Gold! Gold! Gold:
Good or bad a thousand-fold!
  How widely its agencies vary—
To save—to ruin—to curse—to bless—
As even its minted coins express,
Now stamp'd with the image of Good Queen Bess,
  And now of a Bloody Mary.

THE LEE SHORE

SLEET! and Hail! and Thunder!
And ye Winds that rave,
Till the sands thereunder
Tinge the sullen wave—

Winds, that like a Demon,
Howl with horrid note
Round the toiling Seaman,
In his tossing boat—

From his humble dwelling,
On the shingly shore,
Where the billows swelling,
Keep such hollow roar—

From that weeping Woman,
Seeking with her cries
Succour superhuman
From the frowning skies—

From the Urchin pining
For his Father's knee—
From the lattice shining—
Drive him out to sea!

Let broad leagues dissever
Him from yonder foam—
Oh, God! to think Man ever
Comes too near his Home!

SONNET

THE world is with me, and its many cares,
Its woes—its wants—the anxious hopes and fears
That wait on all terrestrial affairs—
The shades of former and of future years—
Foreboding fancies, and prophetic tears,
Quelling a spirit that was once elate :—
Heavens ! what a wilderness the earth appears,
Where Youth, and Mirth, and Health are out of date !
But no—a laugh of innocence and joy
Resounds, like music of the fairy race,
And gladly turning from the world's annoy
I gaze upon a little radiant face,
And bless, internally, the merry boy
Who "makes a *son-shine* in a shady-place."

THE ELM TREE

A DREAM IN THE WOODS

> "And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
> Finds tongues in trees."—*As You Like It.*

'Twas in a shady Avenue,
Where lofty Elms abound—
And from a Tree
There came to me
A sad and solemn sound,
That sometimes murmur'd overhead,
And sometimes underground.

Amongst the leaves it seem'd to sigh,
Amid the boughs to moan;
It mutter'd in the stem, and then
The roots took up the tone;
As if beneath the dewy grass
The dead began to groan.

No breeze there was to stir the leaves;
No bolts that tempests launch,
To rend the trunk or rugged bark;
No gale to bend the branch;
No quake of earth to heave the roots,
That stood so stiff and staunch.

No bird was preening up aloft,
To rustle with its wing;
No squirrel, in its sport or fear,
From bough to bough to spring
The solid bole
Had ne'er a hole
To hide a living thing!

No scooping hollow cell to lodge
A furtive beast or fowl,
The martin, bat,
Or forest cat
That nightly loves to prowl,
Nor ivy nook so apt to shroud
The moping, snoring owl.

But still the sound was in my ear,
A sad and solemn sound,
That sometimes murmur'd overhead,
And sometimes underground—
'Twas in a shady Avenue
Where lofty Elms abound.

O hath the Dryad still a tongue
In this ungenial clime?
Have Sylvan Spirits still a voice
As in the classic prime—
To make the forest voluble,
As in the olden time?

The olden time is dead and gone;
Its years have fill'd their sum—
And e'en in Greece—her native Greece—
The Sylvan Nymph is dumb—
From ash, and beech, and aged oak,
No classic whispers come,

From Poplar, Pine, and drooping Birch,
And fragrant Linden Trees;
No living sound
E'er hovers round,
Unless the vagrant breeze,
The music of the merry bird,
Or hum of busy bees.

But busy bees forsake the Elm
That bears no bloom aloft—
The Finch was in the hawthorn-bush,
The Blackbird in the croft;
And among the firs the brooding Dove,
That else might murmur soft.

Yet still I heard that solemn sound,
And sad it was to boot,
From ev'ry overhanging bough,
And each minuter shoot;
From rugged trunk and mossy rind,
And from the twisted root.

From these,—a melancholy moan;
From those,—a dreary sigh;
As if the boughs were wintry bare,
And wild winds sweeping by—
Whereas the smallest fleecy cloud
Was stedfast in the sky.

No sign or touch of stirring air
Could either sense observe—
The zephyr had not breath enough
The thistle-down to swerve,
Or force the filmy gossamers
To take another curve.

In still and silent slumber hush'd
   All Nature seem'd to be:
From heaven above, or earth beneath,
   No whisper came to me—
Except the solemn sound and sad
   From that MYSTERIOUS TREE!

A hollow, hollow, hollow sound,
   As is that dreamy roar
When distant billows boil and bound
   Along a shingly shore—
But the ocean brim was far aloof,
   A hundred miles or more.

No murmur of the gusty sea,
   No tumult of the beach,
However they may foam and fret,
   The bounded sense could reach—
Methought the trees in mystic tongue
   Were talking each to each!—

Mayhap, rehearsing ancient tales
   Of greenwood love or guilt,
         Of whisper'd vows
         Beneath their boughs;
   Or blood obscurely spilt,
Or of that near-hand Mansion House
   A Royal Tudor built.

Perchance, of booty won or shared
   Beneath the starry cope—
Or where the suicidal wretch
   Hung up the fatal rope;
Or Beauty kept an evil tryste,
   Insnared by Love and Hope.

Of graves, perchance, untimely scoop'd
  At midnight dark and dank—
And what is underneath the sod
  Whereon the grass is rank—
      Of old intrigues,
      And privy leagues,
  Tradition leaves in blank.

Of traitor lips that mutter'd plots—
  Of Kin who fought and fell—
God knows the undiscover'd schemes,
  The arts and acts of Hell,
Perform'd long generations since,
  If trees had tongues to tell!

With wary eyes, and ears alert,
  As one who walks afraid,
I wander'd down the dappled path
  Of mingled light and shade—
How sweetly gleam'd that arch of blue
  Beyond the green arcade!

How cheerly shone the glimpse of Heav'n
  Beyond that verdant aisle!
All overarch'd with lofty elms,
  That quench'd the light, the while,
      As dim and chill
      As serves to fill
  Some old Cathedral pile!

And many a gnarlèd trunk was there,
  That ages long had stood,
Till Time had wrought them into shapes
  Like Pan's fantastic brood;
Or still more foul and hideous forms
  That Pagans carve in wood!

A crouching Satyr lurking here—
   And there a Goblin grim—
As staring full of demon life
   As Gothic sculptor's whim—
A marvel it had scarcely been
   To hear a voice from him!

Some whisper from that horrid mouth
   Of strange, unearthly tone;
Or wild infernal laugh, to chill
   One's marrow in the bone.
But no——it grins like rigid Death,
   And silent as a stone!

As silent as its fellows be,
   For all is mute with them—
The branch that climbs the leafy roof—
   The rough and mossy stem—
         The crooked root,
         And tender shoot,
   Where hangs the dewy gem.

One mystic Tree alone there is,
   Of sad and solemn sound—
That sometimes murmurs overhead,
   And sometimes underground—
In all that shady Avenue,
   Where lofty Elms abound.

PART II

The Scene is changed! No green Arcade,
   No Trees all ranged a-row—
But scatter'd like a beaten host,
   Dispersing to and fro;
With here and there a sylvan corse,
   That fell before the foe.

The Foe that down in yonder dell
Pursues his daily toil;
As witness many a prostrate trunk,
Bereft of leafy spoil,
Hard by its wooden stump, whereon
The adder loves to coil.

Alone he works—his ringing blows
Have banish'd bird and beast;
The Hind and Fawn have canter'd off
A hundred yards at least;
And on the maple's lofty top
The linnet's song has ceased.

No eye his labour overlooks,
Or when he takes his rest,
Except the timid thrush that peeps
Above her secret nest,
Forbid by love to leave the young
Beneath her speckled breast.

The Woodman's heart is in his work,
His axe is sharp and good:
With sturdy arm and steady aim
He smites the gaping wood;
From distant rocks
His lusty knocks
Re-echo many a rood.

His axe is keen, his arm is strong;
The muscles serve him well;
His years have reach'd an extra span,
The number none can tell;
But still his lifelong task has been
The Timber Tree to fell.

Through Summer's parching sultriness,
And Winter's freezing cold,
From sapling youth
To virile growth,
And Age's rigid mould,
His energetic axe hath rung
Within that Forest old.

Aloft, upon his poising steel
The vivid sunbeams glance—
About his head and round his feet
The forest shadows dance;
And bounding from his russet coat
The acorn drops askance.

His face is like a Druid's face,
With wrinkles furrow'd deep,
And tann'd by scorching suns as brown
As corn that's ripe to reap;
But the hair on brow, and cheek, and chin,
Is white as wool of sheep.

His frame is like a giant's frame;
His legs are long and stark;
His arms like limbs of knotted yew;
His hands like rugged bark;
So he felleth still
With right good will,
As if to build an Ark!

Oh! well within *His* fatal path
The fearful Tree might quake
Through every fibre, twig, and leaf,
With aspen tremor shake;
Through trunk and root,
And branch and shoot,
A low complaining make!

Oh! well to *Him* the Tree might breathe
   A sad and solemn sound,
A sigh that murmur'd overhead,
   And groans from underground;
As in that shady Avenue
   Where lofty Elms abound!

But calm and mute the Maple stands,
   The Plane, the Ash, the Fir,
The Elm, the Beech, the drooping Birch,
   Without the least demur;
And e'en the Aspen's hoary leaf
   Makes no unusual stir.

The Pines—those old gigantic Pines,
   That writhe—recalling soon
The famous Human Group that writhes
   With Snakes in wild festoon—
In ramous wrestlings interlaced
   A Forest Laocoon—

Like Titans of primeval girth
   By tortures overcome,
Their brown enormous limbs they twine,
   Bedew'd with tears of gum—
Fierce agonies that ought to yell,
   But, like the marble, dumb.

Nay, yonder blasted Elm that stands
   So like a man of sin,
Who, frantic, flings his arms abroad
   To feel the Worm within—
For all that gesture, so intense,
   It makes no sort of din!

An universal silence reigns
  In rugged bark or peel,
Except that very trunk which rings
  Beneath the biting steel—
Meanwhile the Woodman plies his axe
  With unrelenting zeal!

No rustic song is on his tongue,
  No whistle on his lips;
But with a quiet thoughtfulness
  His trusty tool he grips,
And, stroke on stroke, keeps hacking out
  The bright and flying chips.

Stroke after stroke, with frequent dint
  He spreads the fatal gash;
Till, lo! the remnant fibres rend,
  With harsh and sudden crash,
And on the dull resounding turf
  The jarring branches lash!

Oh! now the Forest Trees may sigh,
  The Ash, the Poplar tall,
The Elm, the Beech, the drooping Birch,
  The Aspens—one and all,
    With solemn groan
    And hollow moan
  Lament a comrade's fall!

A goodly Elm, of noble girth,
  That, thrice the human span—
While on their variegated course
  The constant Seasons ran—
Through gale, and hail, and fiery bolt,
  Had stood erect as Man.

But now, like mortal Man himself,
  Struck down by hand of God,
Or heathen Idol tumbled prone
  Beneath th' Eternal's nod,
In all its giant bulk and length
  It lies along the sod!—

Ay, now the Forest Trees may grieve
  And make a common moan
Around that patriarchal trunk
  So newly overthrown;
And with a murmur recognise
  A doom to be their own!

The Echo sleeps: the idle axe,
  A disregarded tool,
Lies crushing with its passive weight
  The toad's reputed stool—
The Woodman wipes his dewy brow
  Within the shadows cool.

No Zephyr stirs: the ear may catch
  The smallest insect-hum;
But on the disappointed sense
  No mystic whispers come;
No tone of sylvan sympathy,
  The Forest Trees are dumb.

No leafy noise, nor inward voice,
  No sad and solemn sound,
That sometimes murmurs overhead,
  And sometimes underground;
As in that shady Avenue,
  Where lofty Elms abound!

PART III

The deed is done: the Tree is low
   That stood so long and firm;
The Woodman and his axe are gone,
   His toil has found its term;
And where he wrought the speckled Thrush
   Securely hunts the worm.

The Cony from the sandy bank
   Has run a rapid race,
Through thistle, bent, and tangled fern,
   To seek the open space;
And on its haunches sits erect
   To clean its furry face.

The dappled Fawn is close at hand,
   The Hind is browsing near,—
And on the Larch's lowest bough
   The Ousel whistles clear;
         But checks the note
         Within its throat,
   As choked with sudden fear!

With sudden fear her wormy quest
   The Thrush abruptly quits—
Through thistle, bent, and tangled fern
   The startled Cony flits;
And on the Larch's lowest bough
   No more the Ousel sits.

         With sudden fear
         The dappled Deer
   Effect a swift escape;
But well might bolder creatures start,
   And fly, or stand agape,
With rising hair, and curdled blood,
   To see so grim a Shape!

The very sky turns pale above;
The earth grows dark beneath;
The human Terror thrills with cold
And draws a shorter breath—
An universal panic owns
The dread approach of Death!

With silent pace, as shadows come,
And dark as shadows be,
The grisly Phantom takes his stand
Beside the fallen Tree,
And scans it with his gloomy eyes,
And laughs with horrid glee—

A dreary laugh and desolate,
Where mirth is void and null,
As hollow as its echo sounds
Within the hollow skull—
"Whoever laid this tree along,
His hatchet was not dull!

"The human arm and human tool
Have done their duty well!
But after sound of ringing axe
Must sound the ringing knell;
When Elm or Oak
Have felt the stroke,
My turn it is to fell!

"No passive unregarded tree,
A senseless thing of wood,
Wherein the sluggish sap ascends
To swell the vernal bud—
But conscious, moving, breathing trunks
That throb with living blood!

"No forest Monarch yearly clad
In mantle green or brown;
That unrecorded lives, and falls
By hand of rustic clown—
But Kings who don the purple robe,
And wear the jewell'd crown.

"Ah! little recks the Royal mind,
Within his Banquet Hall,
While tapers shine and Music breathes
And Beauty leads the Ball,—
He little recks the oaken plank
Shall be his palace wall!

"Ah, little dreams the haughty Peer,
The while his Falcon flies—
Or on the blood-bedabbled turf
The antler'd quarry dies—
That in his own ancestral Park
The narrow dwelling lies!

"But haughty Peer and mighty King
One doom shall overwhelm!
The oaken cell
Shall lodge him well
Whose sceptre ruled a realm—
While he, who never knew a home,
Shall find it in the Elm!

"The tatter'd, lean, dejected wretch,
Who begs from door to door,
And dies within the cressy ditch,
Or on the barren moor,
The friendly Elm shall lodge and clothe
That houseless man and poor!

"Yea, this recumbent rugged trunk,
That lies so long and prone,
With many a fallen acorn-cup,
And mast, and firry cone—
This rugged trunk shall hold its share
Of mortal flesh and bone!

"A Miser hoarding heaps of gold,
But pale with ague-fears—
A Wife lamenting love's decay,
With secret cruel tears,
Distilling bitter, bitter drops
From sweets of former years—

"A Man within whose gloomy mind
Offence had deeply sunk,
Who out of fierce Revenge's cup
Hath madly, darkly drunk—
Grief, Avarice, and Hate shall sleep
Within this very trunk!

"This massy trunk that lies along,
And many more must fall—
For the very knave
Who digs the grave,
The man who spreads the pall,
And he who tolls the funeral bell,
The Elm shall have them all!

"The tall abounding Elm that grows
In hedgerows up and down;
In field and forest, copse and park,
And in the peopled town,
With colonies of noisy rooks
That nestle on its crown.

"And well th' abounding Elm may grow
In field and hedge so rife,
In forest, copse, and wooded park,
And 'mid the city's strife,
For, every hour that passes by
Shall end a human life!"

The Phantom ends: the shade is gone;
The sky is clear and bright;
On turf, and moss, and fallen Tree,
There glows a ruddy light;
And bounding through the golden fern
The Rabbit comes to bite.

The Thrush's mate beside her sits
And pipes a merry lay;
The Dove is in the evergreen;
And on the Larch's spray
The Fly-bird flutters up and down,
To catch its tiny prey.

The gentle Hind and dappled Fawn
Are coming up the glade;
Each harmless furr'd and feather'd thing
Is glad, and not afraid—
But on my sadden'd spirit still
The Shadow leaves a shade.

A secret, vague, prophetic gloom,
As though by certain mark
I knew the fore-appointed Tree,
Within whose rugged bark
This warm and living frame shall find
Its narrow house and dark.

lded fillet
: may not

That mystic Tree which breathed to me
  A sad and solemn sound,
That sometimes murmur'd overhead,
  And sometimes underground;
Within that shady Avenue
  Where lofty Elms abound.

LEAR

A POOR old king, with sorrow for my crown,
Throned upon straw, and mantled with the wind—
For pity, my own tears have made me blind
That I might never see my children's frown;
And, may be, madness, like a friend, has thrown
A folded fillet over my dark mind,
So that unkindly speech may sound for kind—
Albeit I know not.—I am childish grown—
And have not gold to purchase wit withal—
I that have once maintain'd most royal state—
A very bankrupt now that may not call
My child, my child—all beggar'd save in tears,
Wherewith I daily weep an old man's fate,
Foolish—and blind—and overcome with years!

SONNET

My heart is sick with longing, tho' I feed
On hope; Time goes with such a heavy pace
That neither brings nor takes from thy embrace,
As if he slept—forgetting his old speed:
For, as in sunshine only we can read
The march of minutes on the dial's face,
So in the shadows of this lonely place
There is no love, and Time is dead indeed.
But when, dear lady, I am near thy heart,
Thy smile is time, and then so swift it flies,
It seems we only meet to tear apart,
With aching hands and lingering of eyes.
Alas, alas! that we must learn hours' flight
By the same light of love that makes them bright!

THE SONG OF THE SHIRT

WITH fingers weary and worn,
  With eyelids heavy and red,
A woman sat, in unwomanly rags,
  Plying her needle and thread—
    Stitch! stitch! stitch!
In poverty, hunger, and dirt,
  And still with a voice of dolorous pitch
She sang the "Song of the Shirt."

"Work! work! work!
While the cock is crowing aloof!
  And work—work—work,
Till the stars shine through the roof!
It's Oh! to be a slave
  Along with the barbarous Turk,
Where woman has never a soul to save,
  If this is Christian work!

"Work—work—work
Till the brain begins to swim;
  Work—work—work
Till the eyes are heavy and dim!
Seam, and gusset, and band,
  Band, and gusset, and seam,
Till over the buttons I fall asleep,
  And sew them on in a dream!

"Oh, Men, with Sisters dear!
Oh, Men, with Mothers and Wives!
It is not linen you're wearing out,
But human creatures' lives!
Stitch—stitch—stitch,
In poverty, hunger, and dirt,
Sewing at once, with a double thread,
A Shroud as well as a Shirt.

"But why do I talk of Death?
That Phantom of grisly bone,
I hardly fear his terrible shape,
It seems so like my own—
It seems so like my own,
Because of the fasts I keep;
Oh, God! that bread should be so dear,
And flesh and blood so cheap!

"Work—work—work!
My labour never flags;
And what are its wages? A bed of straw,
A crust of bread—and rags.
That shatter'd roof—and this naked floor—
A table—a broken chair—
And a wall so blank, my shadow I thank
For sometimes falling there!

"Work—work—work!
From weary chime to chime,
Work—work—work—
As prisoners work for crime!
Band, and gusset, and seam,
Seam, and gusset, and band,
Till the heart is sick, and the brain benumb'd,
As well as the weary hand.

"Work—work—work,
In the dull December light,
  And work—work—work,
When the weather is warm and bright—
While underneath the eaves
  The brooding swallows cling
As if to show me their sunny backs
  And twit me with the spring.

"Oh! but to breathe the breath
Of the cowslip and primrose sweet—
  With the sky above my head,
And the grass beneath my feet,
For only one short hour
  To feel as I used to feel,
Before I knew the woes of want
  And the walk that costs a meal!

"Oh! but for one short hour!
  A respite however brief!
No blessed leisure for Love or Hope,
  But only time for Grief!
A little weeping would ease my heart,
  But in their briny bed
My tears must stop, for every drop
  Hinders needle and thread!"

With fingers weary and worn,
  With eyelids heavy and red,
A woman sat in unwomanly rags,
  Plying her needle and thread—
    Stitch! stitch! stitch!
  In poverty, hunger, and dirt,
And still with a voice of dolorous pitch,—
Would that its tone could reach the Rich!—
She sang this "Song of the Shirt!"

THE PAUPER'S CHRISTMAS CAROL

FULL of drink and full of meat,
On our SAVIOUR'S natal day,
CHARITY'S perennial treat;
Thus I heard a Pauper say:—
"Ought not I to dance and sing
Thus supplied with famous cheer?
Heigho!
I hardly know—
Christmas comes but once a year.

"After labour's long turmoil,
Sorry fare and frequent fast,
Two-and-fifty weeks of toil,
Pudding-time is come at last!
But are raisins high or low,
Flour and suet cheap or dear?
Heigho!
I hardly know—
Christmas comes but once a year.

"Fed upon the coarsest fare
Three hundred days and sixty-four,
But for *one* on viands rare,
Just as if I wasn't poor!
Ought not I to bless my stars,
Warden, clerk, and overseer?
Heigho!
I hardly know—
Christmas comes but once a year.

"Treated like a welcome guest,
One of Nature's social chain,
Seated, tended on, and press'd—
But when shall I be press'd again,
Twice to pudding, thrice to beef,
A dozen times to ale and beer?
Heigho!
I hardly know—
Christmas comes but once a year.

"Come to-morrow how it will;
Diet scant and usage rough,
Hunger once has had its fill,
Thirst for once has had enough,
But shall I ever dine again?
Or see another feast appear?
Heigho!
I only know—
Christmas comes but once a year!

"Frozen cares begin to melt,
Hopes revive and spirits flow—
Feeling as I have not felt
Since a dozen months ago—
Glad enough to sing a song—
To-morrow shall I volunteer?
Heigho!
I hardly know—
Christmas comes but once a year.

"Bright and blessed is the time,
Sorrows end and joys begin,
While the bells with merry chime
Ring the Day of Plenty in!
But the happy tide to hail,
With a sigh or with a tear,
Heigho!
I hardly know—
Christmas comes but once a year!"

THE HAUNTED HOUSE

A ROMANCE

"A jolly place, said he, in days of old,
But something ails it now: the spot is curst."
WORDSWORTH.

PART I

SOME dreams we have are nothing else but dreams,
Unnatural, and full of contradictions;
Yet others of our most romantic schemes
Are something more than fictions.

It might be only on enchanted ground;
It might be merely by a thought's expansion;
But, in the spirit or the flesh, I found
An old deserted Mansion.

A residence for woman, child, and man,
A dwelling place,—and yet no habitation;
A House,—but under some prodigious ban
Of excommunication.

Unhinged the iron gates half open hung,
Jarr'd by the gusty gales of many winters,
That from its crumbled pedestal had flung
One marble globe in splinters.

No dog was at the threshold, great or small;
No pigeon on the roof—no household creature—
No cat demurely dozing on the wall—
Not one domestic feature.

No human figure stirr'd, to go or come,
No face look'd forth from shut or open casement;
No chimney smoked—there was no sign of Home
From parapet to basement.

With shatter'd panes the grassy court was starr'd;
The time-worn coping-stone had tumbled after;
And thro' the ragged roof the sky shone, barr'd
With naked beam and rafter.

O'er all there hung a shadow and a fear;
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is Haunted!

The flow'r grew wild and rankly as the weed,
Roses with thistles struggled for espial,
And vagrant plants of parasitic breed
Had overgrown the Dial.

But gay or gloomy, steadfast or infirm,
No heart was there to heed the hour's duration;
All times and tides were lost in one long term
Of stagnant desolation.

The wren had built within the Porch, she found
Its quiet loneliness so sure and thorough;
And on the lawn,—within its turfy mound,—
The rabbit made his burrow.

The rabbit wild and gray, that flitted thro'
The shrubby clumps, and frisk'd, and sat, and vanish'd,
But leisurely and bold, as if he knew
His enemy was banish'd.

The wary crow,—the pheasant from the woods—
Lull'd by the still and everlasting sameness,
Close to the mansion, like domestic broods,
Fed with a "shocking tameness."

X

The coot was swimming in the reedy pond,
Beside the water-hen, so soon affrighted;
And in the weedy moat the heron, fond
Of solitude, alighted.

The moping heron, motionless and stiff,
That on a stone, as silently and stilly,
Stood, an apparent sentinel, as if
To guard the water-lily.

No sound was heard except, from far away,
The ringing of the witwall's shrilly laughter,
Or, now and then, the chatter of the jay,
That Echo murmur'd after.

But Echo never mock'd the human tongue;
Some weighty crime, that Heaven could not pardon,
A secret curse on that old Building hung,
And its deserted Garden.

The beds were all untouch'd by hand or tool;
No footstep marked the damp and mossy gravel,
Each walk as green as is the mantled pool,
For want of human travel.

The vine unpruned, and the neglected peach,
Droop'd from the wall with which they used to grapple;
And on the canker'd tree, in easy reach,
Rotted the golden apple.

But awfully the truant shunn'd the ground,
The vagrant kept aloof, and daring Poacher;
In spite of gaps that thro' the fences round
Invited the encroacher.

For over all there hung a cloud of fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is Haunted!

The pear and quince lay squander'd on the grass;
The mould was purple with unheeded showers
Of bloomy plums—a Wilderness it was
Of fruits, and weeds, and flowers!

The marigold amidst the nettles blew,
The gourd embraced the rose bush in its ramble,
The thistle and the stock together grew,
The holly-hock and bramble.

The bear-bine with the lilac interlaced,
The sturdy bur-dock choked its slender neighbour,
The spicy pink. All tokens were effaced
Of human care and labour.

The very yew Formality had train'd
To such a rigid pyramidal stature,
For want of trimming had almost regain'd
The raggedness of nature.

The Fountain was a-dry—neglect and time
Had marr'd the work of artisan and mason,
And efts and croaking frogs, begot of slime,
Sprawl'd in the ruin'd bason.

The Statue, fallen from its marble base,
Amidst the refuse leaves, and herbage rotten,
Lay like the Idol of some bygone race,
Its name and rites forgotten.

On ev'ry side the aspect was the same,
All ruin'd, desolate, forlorn, and savage:
No hand or foot within the precinct came
To rectify or ravage.

For over all there hung a cloud of fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is Haunted!

PART II

O, VERY gloomy is the House of Woe,
Where tears are falling while the bell is knelling,
With all the dark solemnities which show
That Death is in the dwelling!

O very, very dreary is the room
Where Love, domestic Love, no longer nestles,
But, smitten by the common stroke of doom,
The Corpse lies on the trestles!

But House of Woe, and hearse, and sable pall,
The narrow home of the departed mortal,
Ne'er look'd so gloomy as that Ghostly Hall,
With its deserted portal!

The centipede along the threshold crept,
The cobweb hung across in mazy tangle,
And in its winding-sheet the maggot slept,
At every nook and angle.

The keyhole lodged the earwig and her brood,
The emmets of the steps had old possession,
And march'd in search of their diurnál food
In undisturb'd procession.

As undisturb'd as the prehensile cell
Of moth or maggot, or the spider's tissue,
For never foot upon that threshold fell,
To enter or to issue.

O'er all there hung the shadow of a fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is Haunted!

Howbeit, the door I push'd—or so I dream'd—
Which slowly, slowly gaped,—the hinges creaking
With such a rusty eloquence, it seem'd
That Time himself was speaking.

But Time was dumb within that Mansion old,
Or left his tale to the heraldic banners,
That hung from the corroded walls, and told
Of former men and manners :—

Those tatter'd flags, that with the open'd door,
Seem'd the old wave of battle to remember,
While fallen fragments danced upon the floor,
Like dead leaves in December.

The startled bats flew out,—bird after bird,—
The screech-owl overhead began to flutter,
And seem'd to mock the cry that she had heard
Some dying victim utter !

A shriek that echo'd from the joisted roof,
And up the stair, and further still and further,
Till in some ringing chamber far aloof
It ceased its tale of murther !

Meanwhile the rusty armour rattled round,
The banner shudder'd, and the ragged streamer ;
All things the horrid tenor of the sound
Acknowledged with a tremor.

The antlers, where the helmet hung, and belt,
Stirr'd as the tempest stirs the forest branches,
Or as the stag had trembled when he felt
The blood-hound at his haunches.

The window jingled in its crumbled frame,
And thro' its many gaps of destitution
Dolorous moans and hollow sighings came,
Like those of dissolution.

The wood-louse dropped, and rolled into a ball,
Touch'd by some impulse occult or mechanic;
And nameless beetles ran along the wall
In universal panic.

The subtle spider, that from overhead
Hung like a spy on human guilt and error,
Suddenly turn'd, and up its slender thread
Ran with a nimble terror.

The very stains and fractures on the wall,
Assuming features solemn and terrific,
Hinted some Tragedy of that old Hall,
Lock'd up in hieroglyphic.

Some tale that might, perchance, have solved the doubt,
Wherefore amongst those flags so dull and livid,
The banner of the BLOODY HAND shone out
So ominously vivid.

Some key to that inscrutable appeal,
Which made the very frame of Nature quiver;
And ev'ry thrilling nerve and fibre feel
So ague-like a shiver.

For over all there hung a cloud of fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is Haunted!

If but a rat had linger'd in the house,
To lure the thought into a social channel!
But not a rat remain'd, or tiny mouse,
To squeak behind the panel.

Huge drops roll'd down the walls, as if they wept;
And where the cricket used to chirp so shrilly
The toad was squatting, and the lizard crept
On that damp hearth and chilly.

For years no cheerful blaze had sparkled there,
Or glanced on coat of buff or knightly metal;
The slug was crawling on the vacant chair,—
The snail upon the settle.

The floor was redolent of mould and must,
The fungus in the rotten seams had quicken'd;
While on the oaken table coats of dust
Perennially had thicken'd.

No mark of leathern jack or metal can,
No cup—no horn—no hospitable token,—
All social ties between that board and Man
Had long ago been broken.

There was so foul a rumour in the air,
The shadow of a Presence so atrocious;
No human creature could have feasted there,
Even the most ferocious.

For over all there hung a cloud of fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is Haunted!

PART III

'Tis hard for human actions to account,
Whether from reason or from impulse only—
But some internal prompting bade me mount
The gloomy stairs and lonely.

Those gloomy stairs, so dark, and damp, and cold,
With odours as from bones and relics carnal,
Deprived of rite, and consecrated mould,
The chapel vault, or charnel.

Those dreary stairs, where with the sounding stress
Of ev'ry step so many echoes blended,
The mind, with dark misgivings, fear'd to guess
How many feet ascended.

The tempest with its spoils had drifted in,
Till each unwholesome stone was darkly spotted,
As thickly as the leopard's dappled skin,
With leaves that rankly rotted.

The air was thick—and in the upper gloom
The bat—or something in its shape—was winging;
And on the wall, as chilly as a tomb,
The Death's-Head moth was clinging.

That mystic moth, which, with a sense profound
Of all unholy presence, augurs truly;
And with a grim significance flits round
The taper burning bluely.

Such omens in the place there seem'd to be,
At ev'ry crooked turn, or on the landing,
The straining eyeball was prepared to see
Some Apparition standing.

For over all there hung a cloud of fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is Haunted!

Yet no portentous Shape the sight amazed;
Each object plain, and tangible, and valid;
But from their tarnish'd frames dark Figures gazed,
And Faces spectre-pallid.

Not merely with the mimic life that lies
Within the compass of Art's simulation;
Their souls were looking thro' their painted eyes
With awful speculation.

On ev'ry lip a speechless horror dwelt;
On ev'ry brow the burthen of affliction;
The old Ancestral Spirits knew and felt
The House's malediction.

Such earnest woe their features overcast,
They might have stirr'd, or sigh'd, or wept, or spoken;
But, save the hollow moaning of the blast,
The stillness was unbroken.

No other sound or stir of life was there,
Except my steps in solitary clamber,
From flight to flight, from humid stair to stair,
From chamber into chamber.

Deserted rooms of luxury and state,
That old magnificence had richly furnish'd
With pictures, cabinets of ancient date,
And carvings gilt and burnish'd.

Rich hangings, storied by the needle's art
With scripture history, or classic fable;
But all had faded, save one ragged part,
Where Cain was slaying Abel.

The silent waste of mildew and the moth
Had marr'd the tissue with a partial ravage;
But undecaying frown'd upon the cloth
Each feature stern and savage.

The sky was pale; the cloud a thing of doubt;
Some hues were fresh, and some decay'd and duller;
But still the BLOODY HAND shone strangely out
With vehemence of colour!

The BLOODY HAND that with a lurid stain
Shone on the dusty floor, a dismal token,
Projected from the casement's painted pane,
Where all beside was broken.

The BLOODY HAND significant of crime,
That glaring on the old heraldic banner,
Had kept its crimson unimpair'd by time,
In such a wondrous manner!

O'er all there hung the shadow of a fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is Haunted!

The Death Watch tick'd behind the panel'd oak,
Inexplicable tremors shook the arras,
And echoes strange and mystical awoke,
The fancy to embarrass.

Prophetic hints that filled the soul with dread,
But thro' one gloomy entrance pointing mostly,
The while some secret inspiration said,
That Chamber is the Ghostly!

Across the door no gossamer festoon
Swung pendulous—no web—no dusty fringes,
No silky chrysalis or white cocoon
About its nooks and hinges.

The spider shunn'd the interdicted room,
The moth, the beetle, and the fly were banish'd,
And where the sunbeam fell athwart the gloom
The very midge had vanish'd.

One lonely ray that glanced upon a Bed,
As if with awful aim direct and certain,
To show the Bloody Hand in burning red
Embroider'd on the curtain.

And yet no gory stain was on the quilt—
The pillow in its place had slowly rotted;
The floor alone retain'd the trace of guilt,
Those boards obscurely spotted.

Obscurely spotted to the door, and thence
With mazy doubles to the grated casement—
Oh what a tale they told of fear intense,
Of horror and amazement!

What human creature in the dead of night
Had coursed like hunted hare that cruel distance?
Had sought the door, the window in his flight,
Striving for dear existence?

What shrieking Spirit in that bloody room
Its mortal frame had violently quitted?—
Across the sunbeam, with a sudden gloom,
A ghostly Shadow flitted.

Across the sunbeam, and along the wall,
But painted on the air so very dimly,
It hardly veil'd the tapestry at all,
Or portrait frowning grimly.

O'er all there hung the shadow of a fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is Haunted!

THE MARY

A SEA-SIDE SKETCH

LOV'ST thou not, Alice, with the early tide
To see the hardy Fisher hoist his mast,
And stretch his sail towards the ocean wide,—
Like God's own beadsman going forth to cast
His net into the deep, which doth provide
Enormous bounties, hidden in its vast
Bosom like Charity's, for all who seek
And take its gracious boon thankful and meek?

The sea is bright with morning,—but the dark
Seems still to linger on his broad black sail,
For it is early hoisted, like a mark
For the low sun to shoot at with his pale
And level beams: All round the shadowy bark
The green wave glimmers, and the gentle gale
Swells in her canvas, till the waters show
The keel's new speed, and whiten at the bow.

Then look abaft—(for thou canst understand
That phrase)—and there he sitteth at the stern,
Grasping the tiller in his broad brown hand,
The hardy Fisherman. Thou may'st discern
Ten fathoms off the wrinkles in the tann'd
And honest countenance that he will turn
To look upon us, with a quiet gaze—
As we are passing on our several ways.

So, some ten days ago, on such a morn,
The Mary, like a seamew, sought her spoil
Amongst the finny race: 'twas when the corn
Woo'd the sharp sickle, and the golden toil
Summon'd all rustic hands to fill the horn
Of Ceres to the brim, that brave turmoil
Was at the prime, and Woodgate went to reap
His harvest too, upon the broad blue deep.

His mast was up, his anchor heaved aboard,
His mainsail stretching in the first gray gleams
Of morning, for the wind. Ben's eye was stored
With fishes—fishes swam in all his dreams,
And all the goodly east seem'd but a hoard
Of silvery fishes, that in shoals and streams
Groped into the deep dusk that fill'd the sky,
For him to catch in meshes of his eye.

For Ben had the true sailor's sanguine heart,
And saw the future with a boy's brave thought,
No doubts, nor faint misgivings had a part
In his bright visions—ay, before he caught
His fish, he sold them in the scaly mart,
And summ'd the net proceeds. This should have brought
Despair upon him when his hopes were foil'd,
But though one crop was marr'd, again he toil'd

And sow'd his seed afresh.—Many foul blights
Perish'd his hardwon gains—yet he had plann'd
No schemes of too extravagant delights—
No goodly houses on the Goodwin sand—
But a small humble home, and loving nights,
Such as his honest heart and earnest hand
Might fairly purchase. Were these hopes too airy?
Such as they were, they rested on thee, Mary.

She was the prize of many a toilsome year,
And hardwon wages, on the perilous sea—
Of savings ever since the shipboy's tear
Was shed for home, that lay beyond the lee;—
She was purveyor for his other dear
Mary, and for the infant yet to be
Fruit of their married loves. These made him dote
Upon the homely beauties of his boat,

Whose pitch-black hull roll'd darkly on the wave,
No gayer than one single stripe of blue
Could make her swarthy sides. She seem'd a slave,
A negro among boats—that only knew
Hardship and rugged toil—no pennons brave
Flaunted upon the mast—but oft a few
Dark dripping jackets flutter'd to the air,
Ensigns of hardihood and toilsome care.

And when she ventured for the deep, she spread
A tawny sail against the sunbright sky,
Dark as a cloud that journeys overhead—
But then those tawny wings were stretch'd to fly
Across the wide sea desert for the bread
Of babes and mothers—many an anxious eye
Dwelt on her course, and many a fervent pray'r
Invoked the Heavens to protect and spare.

Where is she now? The secrets of the deep
Are dark and hidden from the human ken;
Only the sea-bird saw the surges sweep
Over the bark of the devoted Ben,—
Meanwhile a widow sobs and orphans weep,
And sighs are heard from weatherbeaten men,
Dark sunburnt men, uncouth and rude and hairy,
While loungers idly ask, "Where is the Mary?"

THE LADY'S DREAM

THE lady lay in her bed,
Her couch so warm and soft,
But her sleep was restless and broken still;
For turning often and oft
From side to side, she mutter'd and moan'd,
And toss'd her arms aloft.

At last she startled up,
And gazed on the vacant air,
With a look of awe, as if she saw
Some dreadful phantom there—
And then in the pillow she buried her face
From visions ill to bear.

The very curtain shook,
Her terror was so extreme;
And the light that fell on the broider'd quilt
Kept a tremulous gleam;
And her voice was hollow, and shook as she cried:—
"Oh me! that awful dream!

"That weary, weary walk,
In the churchyard's dismal ground!
And those horrible things, with shady wings,
That came and flitted round,—
Death, death, and nothing but death,
In every sight and sound!

"And oh! those maidens young,
Who wrought in that dreary room,
With figures drooping and spectres thin,
And cheeks without a bloom;—
And the Voice that cried, 'For the pomp of pride,
We haste to an early tomb!

"'For the pomp and pleasure of Pride,
We toil like Afric slaves,
And only to earn a home at last,
Where yonder cypress waves;'—
And then they pointed—I never saw
A ground so full of graves!

"And still the coffins came,
With their sorrowful trains and slow;
Coffin after coffin still,
A sad and sickening show;
From grief exempt, I never had dreamt
Of such a World of Woe!

"Of the hearts that daily break,
Of the tears that hourly fall,
Of the many, many troubles of life,
That grieve this earthly ball—
Disease and Hunger, and Pain, and Want,
But now I dreamt of them all!

"For the blind and the cripple were there,
And the babe that pined for bread,
And the houseless man, and the widow poor
Who begged—to bury the dead;
The naked, alas, that I might have clad,
The famish'd I might have fed!

"The sorrow I might have sooth'd,
  And the unregarded tears;
For many a thronging shape was there,
  From long-forgotten years,
Ay, even the poor rejected Moor,
  Who raised my childish fears!

"Each pleading look, that long ago
  I scann'd with a heedless eye,
Each face was gazing as plainly there,
  As when I pass'd it by:
Woe, woe for me if the past should be
  Thus present when I die!

"No need of sulphurous lake,
  No need of fiery coal,
But only that crowd of human kind
  Who wanted pity and dole—
In everlasting retrospect—
  Will wring my sinful soul!

"Alas! I have walk'd through life
  Too heedless where I trod;
Nay, helping to trample my fellow-worm,
  And fill the burial sod—
Forgetting that even the sparrow falls
  Not unmark'd of God!

"I drank the richest draughts;
  And ate whatever is good—
Fish, and flesh, and fowl, and fruit,
  Supplied my hungry mood;
But I never remember'd the wretched ones
  That starve for want of food!

"I dress'd as the noble dress,
In cloth of silver and gold,
With silk, and satin, and costly furs,
In many an ample fold;
But I never remember'd the naked limbs
That froze with winter's cold.

"The wounds I might have heal'd!
The human sorrow and smart!
And yet it never was in my soul
To play so ill a part:
But evil is wrought by want of Thought,
As well as want of Heart!"

She clasp'd her fervent hands,
And the tears began to stream;
Large, and bitter, and fast they fell,
Remorse was so extreme:
And yet, oh yet, that many a Dame
Would dream the Lady's Dream!

THE KEY

A MOORISH ROMANCE

"On the east coast, towards Tunis, the Moors still preserve the keys of their ancestors' houses in Spain; to which country they still express the hopes of one day returning, and again planting the crescent on the ancient walls of the Alhambra."—SCOTT'S *Travels in Morocco and Algiers.*

"Is Spain cloven in such a manner as to want closing?"
SANCHO PANZA.

THE Moor leans on his cushion,
With the pipe between his lips;
And still at frequent intervals
The sweet sherbét he sips;
But, spite of lulling vapour
And the sober cooling cup,
The spirit of the swarthy Moor
Is fiercely kindling up!

One hand is on his pistol,
On its ornamented stock,
While his finger feels the trigger
And is busy with the lock—
The other seeks his ataghan,
And clasps its jewell'd hilt—
Oh! much of gore in days of yore
That crooked blade has spilt!

His brows are knit, his eyes of jet
In vivid blackness roll,
And gleam with fatal flashes
Like the fire-damp of the coal;
His jaws are set, and through his teeth
He draws a savage breath,
As if about to raise the shout
Of Victory or Death!

For why? the last Zebeck that came
And moor'd within the Mole,
Such tidings unto Tunis brought
As stir his very soul—
The cruel jar of civil war,
The sad and stormy reign,
That blackens like a thunder cloud
The sunny land of Spain!

No strife of glorious Chivalry,
For honour's gain or loss,
Nor yet that ancient rivalry,
The Crescent with the Cross.
No charge of gallant Paladins
On Moslems stern and stanch;
But Christians shedding Christian blood
Beneath the olive's branch!

A war of horrid parricide,
And brother killing brother;
Yea, like to "dogs and sons of dogs"
That worry one another.
But let them bite and tear and fight,
The more the Kaffers slay,
The sooner Hagar's swarming sons
Shall make the land a prey!

The sooner shall the Moor behold
Th' Alhambra's pile again;
And those who pined in Barbary
Shall shout for joy in Spain—
The sooner shall the Crescent wave
On dear Granada's walls:
And proud Mohammed Ali sit
Within his father's halls!

"Alla-il-alla!" tiger-like
Up springs the swarthy Moor,
And, with a wide and hasty stride,
Steps o'er the marble floor;
Across the hall, till from the wall,
Where such quaint patterns be,
With eager hand he snatches down
An old and massive Key!

A massive Key of curious shape,
And dark with dirt and rust,
And well three weary centuries
The metal might encrust!
For since the King Boabdil fell
Before the native stock,
That ancient Key, so quaint to see,
Hath never been in lock.

Brought over by the Saracens
Who fled across the main,
A token of the secret hope
Of going back again;
From race to race, from hand to hand,
From house to house it pass'd;
O will it ever, ever ope
The Palace gate at last?

Three hundred years and fifty-two
On post and wall it hung—
Three hundred years and fifty-two
A dream to old and young;
But now a brighter destiny
The Prophet's will accords:
The time is come to scour the rust,
And lubricate the wards.

az did 1

For should the Moor with sword and lance
At Algesiras land,
Where is the bold Bernardo now
Their progress to withstand?
To Burgos should the Moslem come,
Where is the noble Cid
Five royal crowns to topple down
As gallant Diaz did?

Hath Xeres any Pounder now,
When other weapons fail,
With club to thrash invaders rash,
Like barley with a flail?
Hath Seville any Perez still,
To lay his clusters low,
And ride with seven turbans green
Around his saddle-bow?

No! never more shall Europe see
Such Heroes brave and bold,
Such Valour, Faith, and Loyalty,
As used to shine of old!
No longer to one battle cry
United Spaniards run,
And with their thronging spears uphold
The Virgin and her Son!

From Cadiz Bay to rough Biscay
Internal discord dwells,
And Barcelona bears the scars
Of Spanish shot and shells.
The fleets decline, the merchants pine
For want of foreign trade;
And gold is scant; and Alicante
Is seal'd by strict blockade!

The loyal fly, and Valour falls,
Opposed by court intrigue;
But treachery and traitors thrive,
Upheld by foreign league;
While factions seeking private ends
By turns usurping reign—
Well may the dreaming, scheming Moor
Exulting point to Spain!

Well may he cleanse the rusty Key
With Afric sand and oil,
And hope an Andalusian home
Shall recompense the toil!
Well may he swear the Moorish spear
Through wild Castile shall sweep,
And where the Catalonian sowed
The Saracen shall reap!

Well may he vow to spurn the Cross
Beneath the Arab hoof,
And plant the Crescent yet again
Above th' Alhambra's roof—
When those from whom St. Jago's name
In chorus once arose,
Are shouting Faction's battle-cries,
And Spain forgets to "Close!"

Well may he swear his ataghan
Shall rout the traitor swarm,
And carve them into Arabesques
That show no human form—
The blame be theirs whose bloody feuds
Invite the savage Moor,
And tempt him with the ancient Key
To seek the ancient door!

main ?
rally, As

THE WORKHOUSE CLOCK

AN ALLEGORY

THERE's a murmur in the air,
And noise in every street—
The murmur of many tongues,
The noise of numerous feet—
While round the Workhouse door
The Labouring Classes flock,
For why? the Overseer of the Poor
Is setting the Workhouse Clock.

Who does not hear the tramp
Of thousands speeding along
Of either sex and various stamp,
Sickly, crippled, or strong,
Walking, limping, creeping
From court, and alley, and lane,
But all in one direction sweeping
Like rivers that seek the main?

Who does not see them sally
From mill, and garret, and room,
In lane, and court and alley,
From homes in poverty's lowest valley,
Furnished with shuttle and loom—
Poor slaves of Civilization's galley—
And in the road and footways rally,
As if for the Day of Doom?
Some, of hardly human form,
Stunted, crooked, and crippled by toil;
Dingy with smoke and dust and oil,
And smirch'd besides with vicious soil,
Clustering, mustering, all in a swarm.

Father, mother, and careful child,
Looking as if it had never smiled—
The Sempstress, lean, and weary, and wan,
With only the ghosts of garments on—
The Weaver, her sallow neighbour,
The grim and sooty Artisan;
Every soul—child, woman, or man,
Who lives—or dies—by labour.

Stirr'd by an overwhelming zeal,
And social impulse, a terrible throng!
Leaving shuttle, and needle, and wheel,
Furnace, and grindstone, spindle, and reel,
Thread, and yarn, and iron, and steel—
Yea, rest and the yet untasted meal—
Gushing, rushing, crushing along,
A very torrent of Man!
Urged by the sighs of sorrow and wrong,
Grown at last to a hurricane strong,
Stop its course who can!
Stop who can its onward course
And irresistible moral force;
O vain and idle dream!
For surely as men are all akin,
Whether of fair or sable skin,
According to Nature's scheme,
That Human Movement contains within
A Blood-Power stronger than Steam.

Onward, onward, with hasty feet,
They swarm—and westward still—
Masses born to drink and eat,
But starving amidst Whitechapel's meat,
And famishing down Cornhill!
Through the Poultry—but still unfed—
Christian Charity, hang your head!
Hungry—passing the Street of Bread;

the light

Thirsty—the street of Milk;
Ragged—beside the Ludgate Mart,
So gorgeous, through Mechanic-Art,
With cotton, and wool, and silk!

At last, before that door
That bears so many a knock
Ere ever it opens to Sick or Poor,
Like sheep they huddle and flock—
And would that all the Good and Wise
Could see the Million of hollow eyes,
With a gleam deriv'd from Hope and the skies,
Upturn'd to the Workhouse Clock!

Oh that the Parish Powers,
Who regulate Labour's hours,
The daily amount of human trial,
Weariness, pain, and self-denial,
Would turn from the artificial dial
That striketh ten or eleven,
And go, for once, by that older one
That stands in the light of Nature's sun,
And takes its time from Heaven!

THE BRIDGE OF SIGHS

"Drown'd! drown'd!"—*Hamlet.*

ONE more Unfortunate,
Weary of breath,
Rashly importunate,
Gone to her death!

Take her up tenderly,
Lift her with care;
Fashion'd so slenderly,
Young, and so fair!

Look at her garments
Clinging like cerements;
Whilst the wave constantly
Drips from her clothing;
Take her up instantly,
Loving, not loathing.—

Touch her not scornfully;
Think of her mournfully,
Gently and humanly;
Not of the stains of her,
All that remains of her
Now is pure womanly.

Make no deep scrutiny
Into her mutiny
Rash and undutiful:
Past all dishonour,
Death has left on her
Only the beautiful.

Still, for all slips of hers,
One of Eve's family—
Wipe those poor lips of hers
Oozing so clammily.

Loop up her tresses
Escaped from the comb,
Her fair auburn tresses;
Whilst wonderment guesses
Where was her home?

Who was her father?
Who was her mother?
Had she a sister?
Had she a brother?
Or was there a dearer one
Still, and a nearer one
Yet, than all other?

Alas! for the rarity
Of Christian charity
Under the sun!
Oh! it was pitiful!
Near a whole city full,
Home she had none.

Sisterly, brotherly,
Fatherly, motherly
Feelings had changed:
Love, by harsh evidence,
Thrown from its eminence;
Even God's providence
Seeming estranged.

Where the lamps quiver
So far in the river,
With many a light
From window and casement,
From garret to basement,
She stood, with amazement,
Houseless by night.

The bleak wind of March
Made her tremble and shiver;
But not the dark arch,
Or the black flowing river:
Mad from life's history,
Glad to death's mystery,
Swift to be hurl'd—
Any where, any where
Out of the world!

In she plunged boldly,
No matter how coldly
The rough river ran,—
Over the brink of it,
Picture it—think of it,
Dissolute Man!
Lave in it, drink of it,
Then, if you can!

Take her up tenderly,
Lift her with care;
Fashion'd so slenderly,
Young, and so fair!

Ere her limbs frigidly
Stiffen too rigidly,
Decently,—kindly,—
Smooth, and compose them;
And her eyes, close them,
Staring so blindly!

Dreadfully staring
Thro' muddy impurity,
As when with the daring
Last look of despairing
Fix'd on futurity.

Perishing gloomily,
Spurr'd by contumely,
Cold inhumanity,
Burning insanity,
Into her rest.—
Cross her hands humbly,
As if praying dumbly,
Over her breast!

Owning her weakness,
Her evil behaviour,
And leaving, with meekness,
Her sins to her Saviour!

THE LAY OF THE LABOURER

A SPADE! a rake! a hoe!
A pickaxe, or a bill!
A hook to reap, or a scythe to mow,
A flail, or what ye will—
And here's a ready hand
To ply the needful tool,
And skill'd enough, by lessons rough,
In Labour's rugged school.

To hedge, or dig the ditch,
To lop or fell the tree,
To lay the swarth on the sultry field,
Or plough the stubborn lea;
The harvest stack to bind,
The wheaten rick to thatch,
And never fear in my pouch to find
The tinder or the match.

To a flaming barn or farm
My fancies never roam;
The fire I yearn to kindle and burn
Is on the hearth of Home;
Where children huddle and crouch
Through dark long winter days,
Where starving children huddle and crouch,
To see the cheerful rays,
A-glowing on the haggard cheek,
And not in the haggard's blaze!

To Him who sends a drought
  To parch the fields forlorn,
The rain to flood the meadows with mud,
  The blight to blast the corn,
To Him I leave to guide
  The bolt in its crooked path,
To strike the miser's rick, and show
  The skies blood-red with wrath.

A spade! a rake! a hoe!
  A pickaxe, or a bill!
A hook to reap, or a scythe to mow,
  A flail, or what ye will—
The corn to thrash, or the hedge to plash,
  The market-team to drive,
Or mend the fence by the cover side,
  And leave the game alive.

Ay, only give me work,
  And then you need not fear
That I shall snare his Worship's hare,
  Or kill his Grace's deer;
Break into his lordship's house,
  To steal the plate so rich;
Or leave the yeoman that had a purse
  To welter in a ditch.

Wherever Nature needs,
  Wherever Labour calls,
No job I'll shirk of the hardest work,
  To shun the workhouse walls;
Where savage laws begrudge
  The pauper babe its breath,
And doom a wife to a widow's life,
  Before her partner's death.

My only claim is this,
With labour stiff and stark,
By lawful turn, my living to earn,
Between the light and dark;
My daily bread, and nightly bed,
My bacon, and drop of beer—
But all from the hand that holds the land,
And none from the overseer!

No parish money, or loaf,
No pauper badges for me,
A son of the soil, by right of toil
Entitled to my fee.
No alms I ask, give me my task:
Here are the arm, the leg,
The strength, the sinews of a Man,
To work, and not to beg.

Still one of Adam's heirs,
Though doom'd by chance of birth
To dress so mean, and to eat the lean
Instead of the fat of the earth;
To make such humble meals
As honest labour can,
A bone and a crust, with a grace to God,
And little thanks to man!

A spade! a rake! a hoe!
A pickaxe, or a bill!
A hook to reap, or a scythe to mow,
A flail, or what ye will—
Whatever the tool to ply,
Here is a willing drudge,
With muscle and limb, and woe to him
Who does their pay begrudge!

Who every weekly score
   Docks labour's little mite,
Bestows on the poor at the temple door,
But robb'd them over night.
The very shilling he hoped to save,
   As health and morals fail,
Shall visit me in the New Bastille,
   The Spital, or the Gaol!

STANZAS

FAREWELL, Life! My senses swim,
And the world is growing dim;
Thronging shadows cloud the light,
Like the advent of the night,—
Colder, colder, colder still,
Upward steals a vapour chill—
Strong the earthy odour grows—
I smell the mould above the rose!

Welcome, Life! the Spirit strives!
Strength returns, and hope revives;
Cloudy fears and shapes forlorn
Fly like shadows at the morn,—
O'er the earth there comes a bloom—
Sunny light for sullen gloom,
Warm perfume for vapour cold—
I smell the rose above the mould!

February 1845.

NOTES

To Hope (p. 1).—*London Magazine*, July 1821.

The Departure of Summer (p. 3).—*London Magazine*, November 1821.

The Sea of Death (p. 7).—*London Magazine*, March 1822.

To an Absentee (p. 9).—*London Magazine*, April 1822, signed "Incog."

Lycus the Centaur (p. 10).—*London Magazine*, August 1822.

The Two Peacocks of Bedfont (p. 22).—*London Magazine*, October 1822.

Hymn to the Sun (p. 29).—*London Magazine*, September 1822, signed "T."

Sonnet: Midnight (p. 30).—*London Magazine*, December 1822.

Sonnets (pp. 30 and 31): *To a sleeping child.*—*London Magazine*, December 1822, signed "T."

Sonnet (p. 31): *To Fancy.*—*London Magazine*, December 1822, signed "T."

Fair Ines (p. 32).—*London Magazine*, January 1823, signed "H."

To a False Friend (p. 33).—Date uncertain, but ascribed by Hood's children conjecturally to this year.

Ode: Autumn (p. 34).—*London Magazine*, February 1823.

Sonnet: Silence (p. 36).—*London Magazine*, February 1823.

Sonnet written in Keats's "Endymion" (p. 36).—This sonnet and the following were in the *London* for May 1823.

To a Cold Beauty (p. 37).—*London Magazine*, June 1823.

Sonnet: Death (p. 38).—*London Magazine*, June 1823.

Serenade (p. 39).—Hood's children found this Poem in MS. dated 1823. Place of first publication as yet unknown.

Verses in an Album (p. 39).—Assigned by Hood's son and daughter to this year, 1824. Apparently not printed until after Hood's death.

The Forsaken (p. 40).—First printed, apparently, in the "Plea of the Midsummer Fairies," etc., in 1827.

Song (p. 41): "The Stars are with the Voyager," "Plea of Midsummer Fairies," 1827.

Song: "O Lady, leave thy silken thread." Date unknown (p. 42).—Written in some album, and communicated to the *Times* after Hood's death by Mr. F. Shoberl.

Birthday Verses (p. 43).—This and the three following poems are assigned by Hood's son and daughter from internal evidence to the year 1824. The Birthday Verses were first printed in the *Gem* for 1829.

The Two Swans (p. 46).—*New Monthly Magazine*, 1824.

Ode on a Distant Prospect of Clapham Academy (p. 57).—*New Monthly Magazine*, 1824.

Song: "There is dew for the Flow'ret" (p. 62).—The first two stanzas by Hood, the other two contributed by Barry Cornwall at the request of Mrs. Hood, with a view to the poem being set to music.

The Water Lady (p. 63).—*Forget-me-not* for 1826. Suggested, according to Hood's son, by a water-colour drawing by Keats's friend Severn.

Autumn (p. 64).—*Friendship's Offering*, 1826.

I remember, I remember (p. 65).—*Friendship's Offering*, 1826.

The Poet's Portion (p. 66).—Printed after Hood's death in 1846. Original date unknown.

Ode to the Moon (p. 67).—*Blackwood's Magazine*, 1827.

Sonnet written in a volume of Shakspeare (p. 70).—*Literary Souvenir*, 1827.

A Retrospective Review (p. 71).—*Literary Souvenir*, 1827.

Ballad: "It was not in the winter" (p. 75).—*Literary Souvenir*, 1827.

Time, Hope, and Memory (p. 76).—*Friendship's Offering*, 1827.

Flowers (p. 77): "I will not have the mad Clytie."—*Friendship's Offering*, 1827.

Ballad (p. 78): "She's up and gone, the graceless girl."—*Friendship's Offering*, 1827.

Ruth (p. 79).—*Forget-me-not*, 1827.

The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies (p. 80).—The opening Poem in the volume published by Hood in 1827, under the same title. The Poem was prefaced by the following letter to Charles Lamb:—

"My dear Friend, I thank my literary fortune that I am not reduced like many better wits to barter dedications, for the hope or promise of patronage, with some nominally great man; but that where true affection points, and honest respect, I am free to gratify my head and heart by a sincere inscription. An intimacy and dearness, worthy of a much earlier date than our acquaintance can refer to, direct me at once to your name; and with this acknowledgement of your ever kind feeling towards me, I desire to record a respect and admiration for you as a writer, which no one acquainted with our literature, save Elia himself, will think disproportionate or misplaced. If I had not these better reasons to govern me, I should be guided to the same selection by your intense yet critical relish for the works of the great Dramatist, and for that favourite play in particular which has furnished the subject of my verses.

It is my design in the following poem to celebrate by an allegory that immortality which Shakspeare has conferred on the fairy mythology by his Midsummer Night's Dream. But for him, those pretty children of our childhood would leave barely their names to our maturer years; they belong, as the mites upon the plumb, to the bloom of fancy, a thing generally too frail and beautiful to withstand the rude handling of time: but the Poet has made this most perishable part of the mind's creation equal to the most enduring; he has so intertwined the Elfins with human sympathies, and linked them by so many delightful associations with the productions of nature, that they are as real to the mind's eye, as their green magical circles to the outer sense. It would have been a pity for such a race to go extinct, even though they were but as the butterflies that hover about the leaves and blossoms of the visible world. I am, my dear friend, yours most truly, T. Hood."

Hero and Leander (p. 122).—This poem, and those that follow, up to the sonnets on page 159, appeared for the first time, apparently, in the volume of 1827.

The Dream of Eugene Aram (p. 160).—Hood edited *The Gem*, one of the many annuals of that day, for the year 1829. The volume is memorable for having contained this fine poem, and also Charles Lamb's lines "On an Infant dying as soon as born," written on the death of Hood's first child.

"The Dream of Eugene Aram" was subsequently published in separate form, with Illustrations by William Harvey, and dedicated to John Hamilton Reynolds. It was then furnished with the Preface, given below, and with the Defence, supposed to have been delivered by the criminal on his trial. The Preface is as follows:—

"The remarkable name of Eugene Aram, belonging to a man of unusual talents and acquirements, is unhappily associated with a deed of blood as extraordinary in its details as any recorded in our calendar of crime. In the year 1745, being then an usher and deeply engaged in the study of Chaldee, Hebrew, Arabic, and the Celtic dialects, for the formation of a lexicon, he abruptly turned over a still darker page in human knowledge, and the brow that learning might have made illustrious was stamped ignominious for ever with the brand of Cain. To obtain a trifling property he concerted with an accomplice, and with his own hand effected the violent death of one Daniel Clarke, a shoemaker, of Knaresborough, in Yorkshire. For fourteen years nearly the secret slept with the victim in the earth of St. Robert's Cave, and the manner of its discovery would appear a striking example of the divine justice even amongst those marvels narrated in that curious old volume alluded to in the *Fortunes of Nigel*, under its quaint title of 'God's Revenge against Murther.'

"The accidental digging up of a skeleton, and the unwary and emphatic declaration of Aram's accomplice that it could not be that of Clarke, betraying a guilty knowledge of the true bones, he was wrought to a confession of their deposit. The learned homicide was seized and arraigned, and a trial of uncommon interest was wound up by a defence as memorable as the tragedy itself for eloquence and ingenuity—too ingenious for innocence, and eloquent enough to do credit even to that long premeditation which the interval between the deed and its discovery had afforded. That this dreary period had not passed without paroxysms of remorse may be inferred from a fact of affecting interest. The late Admiral Burney was a scholar at the school at Lynn in Norfolk when Aram was an usher, subsequent to his crime. The Admiral stated that Aram was beloved by the boys, and that he used to discourse to them of murder, not occasionally, as I have written elsewhere, but constantly, and in somewhat of the spirit ascribed to him in the poem.

"For the more imaginative part of the version I must refer back to one of those unaccountable visions which come upon us like frightful monsters thrown up by storms from the great black deeps of slumber. A lifeless body, in love and relationship the nearest and dearest, was imposed upon my back, with an overwhelming sense of obligation—not of filial piety merely, but some awful responsibility, equally vague and intense, and involving, as it seemed, inexpiable sin, horrors unutterable, torments intolerable—to bury my dead, like Abraham, out of my sight. In vain I attempted, again and again, to obey the mysterious mandate—by some dreadful process the burthen was replaced with a more stupendous weight of injunction, and an appalling conviction of the impossibility of its fulfilment. My mental anguish was indescribable;—the mighty agonies of souls tortured on the supernatural racks of sleep are not to be penned—and if in sketching those that belong to blood-guiltiness I have been at all successful, I owe it mainly to the uninvoked inspiration of that terrible dream."

The introduction of Admiral Burney's name makes it likely that Hood may have owed his first interest in the story to Charles Lamb. The circumstance that the book over which the gentle boy was poring when questioned by the usher was called the *Death of Abel*, is by no means forced or unnatural. Salomon Gessner's prose poem, *Der Tod Abels*, published in 1758, attained an astonishing popularity throughout Europe, and appeared in an English version somewhere about the time of the discovery of Aram's crime.

Sonnet for the 14th of February (p. 167).—*Forget-me-not* for 1830.

The Death-Bed (p. 168).—*The Englishman's Magazine*, August 1831. This magazine was a venture of Edward Moxon, the publisher, but had a career of only seven months. It is memorable, however, for including, besides the above and various papers by Charles Lamb, poetical contributions from Tennyson and Arthur Hallam, and also for containing the review by the latter of Tennyson's first volume of poems, published in 1830. The beautiful stanzas of Hood's appear here, as far as I have discovered, for the first time. The date of their composition remains unfixed. Hood's son was under the impression that they were written on the death of one of his father's sisters, but supplied no evidence bearing on the question.

Anticipation (p. 169).—*Englishman's Magazine*, September 1831. These impressive, if rather morbid, lines seem to have been hitherto overlooked by Hood's editors, and are here collected for the first time.

To a Child embracing his Mother (p. 171).—Printed in the *Athenæum* in 1832.

Stanzas (p. 172).—From Hood's novel of *Tylney Hall*, published in 1834; apparently one of the many tender tributes originally addressed by Hood to his wife.

Sonnet to Ocean (p. 172).—Written in 1835 after Hood's disastrous voyage to Rotterdam, in which the ship was nearly lost, and Hood's health was permanently affected.

To ——. Composed at Rotterdam (p. 173).—These stanzas, addressed to Mrs. Hood, appeared first in the *Athenæum* in March 1835.

Lines (*on seeing my wife and two children sleeping in the same chamber*) (p. 175).—Written at Coblenz, where Hood and his family were then settled, in November 1835.

Lines: "Is there a bitter pang for love removed" (p. 176). —Assigned by Hood's son to the year 1835, but apparently only on conjecture.

Ode to Rae Wilson (p. 177).—In my Prefatory Memoir I have related the origin of this famous *jeu d'esprit*, with some account of the person to whom it is addressed. Mr. Rae Wilson has survived in literary history chiefly through Hood's ode. It was first printed in the *Athenæum* in March 1837.

To my Daughter (p. 193).—Written at Ostend in September 1839.

Miss Kilmansegg (p. 194).—Originally published by instalments in Colburn's *New Monthly Magazine* in 1840 and 1841, as one of a proposed series to be entitled "Rhymes for the Times."

The Lee Shore (p. 279).—This and the three following poems belong to the year 1842.

The Song of the Shirt (p. 299).—Christmas number of *Punch*, 1843. See Prefatory Memoir, and further particulars in Mr. Spielmann's excellent and exhaustive *History of Punch*.

The Pauper's Christmas Carol (p. 302).—From the same number of *Punch* in 1843. It was naturally overshadowed by its more remarkable companion.

The Haunted House (p. 304).—From the opening number of *Hood's Magazine*, January 1844. Written to accompany an engraving from a painting by Thomas Creswick, bearing the same title.

All the remaining poems appeared in *Hood's Magazine* during the year 1844. That entitled *The Mary* had the initial "B" appended to it on its appearance in the Magazine, perhaps purposely to disguise the authorship, Hood having himself contributed so large a part besides of the number in question. For internal evidence points to its being Hood's, and notably the introduction of the name of Tom Woodgate, the Hastings boatman, to whom Hood, as well as Charles Lamb, was so devoted.

Stanzas (p. 339).—Hood's last verses. They appeared in his Magazine in February 1845, and were thus probably composed during the previous month. In the original collection of Hood's serious poems, published after his death, they were wrongly assigned to the April of this year. Hood died on the third of May.

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